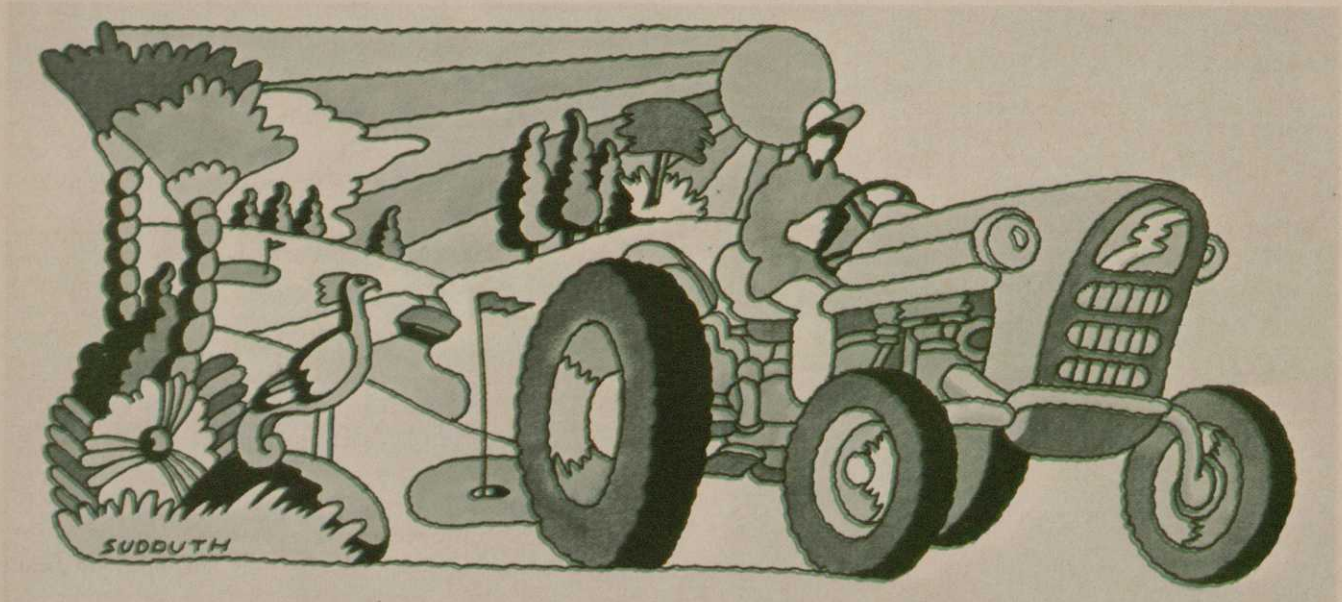
ADJUSTING TO THE ENVIRONMENT

By William Day

Golf courses are ideal ecological testing grounds, provided the approach blends sophistication and sensitivity to the land



ECOLOGY is a word that is being bantered about by many people today. To the college student it probably has a different meaning than it does for the golf course superintendent, manager or professional who works with and on the land and has a first-hand knowledge of the laws of nature.

Defined, ecology is the branch of biology dealing with the interrelation between organisms and their environment. A more common definition is the relation of man to his physical surroundings.

The golf course superintendent is a person who has undeniably strong ties with the environment. In his daily work he is continually striving to make his course more beautiful, more functional, as well as a place where golfers will want to come for recreation and enjoyment of the area he has developed for them.

Since World War II, the introduction and proliferation of detergents, chemical pesticides and fertilizers and the automobile have seriously jeopardized the environment with air, water and noise pollution which ultimately also endanger all plant and animal life.

However, in the last few years people have become more ecologically aware and are now determined to act upon this awareness before damage is irreversible. In Southern California, a mecca for ecological thinking, golf course managers and superintendents are now looking for ecologically sound methods for maintaining and improving the natural environment of their courses without further adding to the problems of pollution.

The use of "hard" pesticides such as DDT has long been under fire from ecologists because of its long-lasting toxic effects. Some clubs in Southern California are now experimenting with new non-toxic herbicides like Rotonone and Tri-Excel-DS which, according to one manager, work as well as the hard pesticides without any danger to golfers and beneficial plant and animal life. (Tri-Excel-DS can be purchased from Natural Development Company, Bainbridge, Pa.)

One ingenious manager had a difficult problem two years ago with a beetle that was boring into the greens and causing havoc with putters. He discovered that the insect "praying mantis" ate the beetles and just about any other insect pest that crossed its path. This spring he purchased several mantis egg cases and put them near the greens where the beetles were especially thick. Two weeks after the eggs hatched, the beetle problem was cleared up.

For more information about this interesting and effective aspect of insect control contact: Ecological Insect Service, 15075 W. California Ave., Kerman, Calif. 93630 or Eastern Biological Control, R.D. #5, Box 379, Jackson, N.J. 08527.

Visual or aesthetic pollution is as pressing a problem as any other type of pollution. But the golf course has the distinct advantage of being a beautiful place for recreation that still preserves many of the natural environmental features of the area.

The Torrey Pines Municipal Golf Course, La Jolla, Calif., home of the Andy Williams Classic, is a good example of this. The course (along with an adjoining 877-acre state reserve) offers golfers and visitors a chance to see the only stand of Torrey Pines (*pinus Torreyana)* on the mainland of the United States. These gnarled, bent and twisted trees reflect their proximity to the sea. There are 2,000 full grown trees in the area. TPMGC manager Dick Mayer told GOLFDOM that the course takes special pride in its trees and uses only sprays that will not harm the valuable pines which make the course one of the most beautiful in the country. Mayer also noted that this year Torrey Pines is going to have a match tournament to raise money to help preserve these unique trees.

Another difficulty that is becoming more acute every year is noise pollution. Many of the new courses in Southern California are being located away from streets and highways where automobile noise abounds.

This is the case at La Costa CC, host of the Tournament of Champions and the American Airlines Astrojet Classic. It has a 7,200-yard course that extends from the well-equipped pro shop east toward the mountains. All the residential housing units are placed so that traffic streets do not run near the greens. Eddie Susalla, executive director and professional at La Costa, thinks that the designs of the future in golf courses will completely eliminate the automobile from anywhere around the course.

Susalla mentioned another special ecological problem at La Costa—the intrusion of salt water on the course from the nearby Pacific Ocean. Susalla designed a system which put tile under the affected areas, thus allowing fresh water to run on the course instead. This is a good example of what can be done with ecological thinking.

An ecological dilemma that faces many clubs in arid Southern California and in other parts of the country as well, is the lack of rainfall. Ted Nyergers, manager of the Whispering Palms GC in Rancho Santa Fe, finds this to be his number one problem. Building lakes and small ponds that blend in with the scenery is a good way to deal with this water problem. These small ponds not only add beauty and recreational possibilities to the course but are also sources of inexpensive water for irrigation to the greens.

Garbage and what to do with it is an ecological concern common to everyone. As waste proliferates each year, it becomes increasingly difficult to find space for the accumulation. Because Southern California does not allow incineration because of air pollution, it's an especially difficult problem there.

One club is toying with the idea of collecting its clippings and other refuse into a pile for decomposition. The finished product is then sold and recycled as compost for fertilizing farms and gardens. Although this idea is a new one, several towns are currently doing it and are making a profit plus getting rid of the waste. The club can also cut down on its fertilizer bill by utilizing its own products.

We have had a rather brief look at some aspects of the ecological picture and how it might apply to golf course management. The golf course is a good example of how man might blend his recreational facilities with his environment and still preserve the delicate ecological balance of nature. □