

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

Thirty-eight years ago, Rachel Carson fired the first shot in the environmental activists' war on pesticides. In her infamous book, *Silent Spring*, Carson predicted pesticides would wipe out our wildlife, leaving no birds to greet us in the spring.

After nearly four decades of clamoring for change, I have but one question for those organizations hellbent on banning pesticides: Do you know what the number one killer of birds is? I do, and it has nothing to do with chemicals.

Scott Gillihan, author of *Bird Conservation on Golf Courses*, gave me the answer — cats — during his USGA Regional Seminar presentation in Tampa recently. According to Gillihan, also of the Colorado Bird Observatory, cats account for about 300 million bird deaths a year. For crying out loud, even Diazinon wasn't that effective.

Pardon the Diazinon reference, but if it seems as if I have a bone to pick with Carson, I do. Carson's "silent spring" has become my "paranoid spring" because the activists are still ranting about pesticide. Hey folks, in case you haven't noticed, the birds that manage to dodge the cats are still chirping — and they do a lot of their singing on golf courses where pesticides are used regularly.

That point was driven home in April when I visited Interlachen CC, an urban golf course in Winter Park, Fla. Katie Cox, an environmental science major at the University of Central Florida, serves as the environmental technician for superintendent Stuart Leventhal. Cox told me that she and wildlife educator, Cyndy Meketa of the Orange County Parks and Recreation Department, identified 33 species of birds on a course inspection in March in only 2.5 hours. Leventhal also told me that one of his members, an avid bird watcher, has recorded 98 species of indigenous and migratory birds on the course over the years. That doesn't sound as if the course is "silent" to me.

Leventhal, like many superintendents, has adopted an environmentally sensitive approach to the management of his course. He has learned to apply chemicals only when and where necessary. At the same time, Interlachen

Reality Refutes Rachel's Rants

BY JOEL JACKSON



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is one of the most manicured courses in town with some of the fastest greens you'll ever putt.

Every day, more and more superintendents are abandoning old pesticide strategies. In doing so, they are challenging all superintendents to become better managers and stewards of the environment. That should be good news to environmentalists everywhere.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Todd Peterson, EPA's review manager, on the current trends in the uses of Nematicur on golf courses. In preparation for that conversation, I culled comments from about two dozen superintendents on their current practices. I was somewhat surprised — but very pleased — at the results of my inquiries.

Nearly 30 percent of the superintendents were either not using any Nematicur or, if they were, they were only using small amounts on problem greens. Another 30 percent were using it about once a year primarily on greens and tees, as well as a few hot spots on fairways. The remaining 40 percent applied it twice a year, according to the label, usually on greens and tees, with some fairways being treated as needed.

This was not a scientific sample, of course, but the comments on Nematicur from these superintendents support a trend I've seen over the past few years. Superintendents are definitely using pesticides more judiciously overall and still producing top-quality playing surfaces. The underlying message from these success stories is that environmentally sensitive golf course management is not a contradiction in terms.

Meanwhile, as I dutifully fill the bird feeders in my back yard, I can't wait to hear the songs of birds fill my ears with sound instead of silence.

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.