

AUDUBON

in Action

After 10 years, superintendents see advantages in getting with the program



Editor's Note: Audubon International's Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Golfdom talked with superintendents — some newcomers to the program, and some who've been with it almost from the beginning — to hear how Audubon has affected the way they manage their golf courses.

VANCE MUCH
Superintendent at Semiahmoo Golf & CC,
Blaine, Wash.

Audubon Member: 1993

Water conservation resonates well with residents of Blaine, Wash., a town that considers itself on the cutting edge of environmental protection. So it's no surprise that Vance Much does all he can to foster a good relationship between his golf course and the environment.

"I watch my water use carefully," Much says. "We've let much of our golf course revert to a natural state, particularly in the roughs. The city wants me to do this, and I want to do it."

Since Much documents his environmental practices in detail to retain his certification from Audubon International every two years, environmental inspections from tough state regulators are a breeze. Much says the positive re-

sponse from his members convinced him to stay with the program over the last eight years.

"Golf courses have had a bad rap for polluting the environment for a long time," Much says. "The people who work for Audubon International have gone a long way toward changing that perception in the media and among the general public. For that change alone, their efforts should be applauded."

Much says he also has a personal reason for maintaining the program: his two daughters.

"All human beings share the planet, and we have a responsibility to those who come after us," Much says. "I want my daughters to have a planet to grow up on, and it's my job to do what I can to make sure that happens."

PETER LEUZINGER
Superintendent at The Ivanhoe Club,
Ivanhoe, Ill.

Audubon Member: 1995
(also helped St. Charles (Ill.) CC achieve certification in 1993)

Peter Leuzinger says he supported Audubon International's environmental efforts from the beginning — and he has the credentials to back his claim. In 1993, Leuzinger oversaw the entrance of St. Charles CC in St. Charles, Ill., into the program — the first mainland United States course to join.

"I got involved with Audubon International because I was tired of being accused of doing things to hurt the environment," Luezinger says.



Vance Much says Audubon International gives superintendents a framework for responsible environmental stewardship.

TIMELINE FOR THE AUDUBON COOPERATIVE SANCTUARY FOR GOLF COURSES

1991
 The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses is created in cooperation with the USGA.

1993
 The Audubon Signature Program is created to serve properties under development.

1995
 Seminars on *Wildlife Management and Habitat Conservation* and *Natural Resource Management on Golf Courses* are offered through GCSAA.

1996
 Audubon International publishes *A Guide to Environmental Stewardship for Golf Courses* in conjunction with the USGA.



Black bears are some of the wildlife that visit The Legacy Club at Alaqua Lakes in Orlando.

“The Cooperative Sanctuary program gave us a framework from which we could defend ourselves.”

Leuzinger says his work at The Ivanhoe Club included building birdhouses for the bluebird population, which had plummeted to near zero. Thanks to Leuzinger’s decision to build bird boxes, 40 to 60 bluebirds return to the course annually during the spring and summer.

His renewed environmental work also rejuvenated his career, Leuzinger says. Before he got involved with Audubon International, the stress of being a superintendent took its toll. The daily grind of fighting golfer ignorance and negotiating club politics left him weary. Instead of waking up every morning thrilled to

go to work, Leuzinger says he’d started to look upon being a superintendent as just another job.

But the idea of actively protecting the environment appealed to him. It reawakened his latent interest in photography, and Leuzinger snaps pictures of the wildlife on the course almost compulsively.

“When you find something that sparks your interest and makes you want to come to work every day, you must seize the opportunity,” Leuzinger says. “Most superintendents are environmentalists at heart, and this program gives them guidelines on how to do it effectively. I’m shocked that more golf courses aren’t involved.”

JOHN KOPACK
Superintendent, The Legacy Club at Alaqua Lakes, Orlando
Audubon Member: 2000

John Kopack loves the community involvement portion of his Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program the most. But it’s the kids he’s mentored in the fifth-grade ecology club at Heathrow Elementary School in suburban Orlando that have a special place in his heart.

He loves watching the kids’ eyes light up when he explains to them about the wildlife that lives on his course. He loves the enthusiasm they have for protecting the environment, which includes, under Kopack’s direction, the creation of a but-

terfly garden at the school. He enjoys linking them with outdoor activities, and he hopes they practice environmentalism in the future.

“Kids don’t spend a lot of time outdoors anymore,” Kopack says. “They plop down in front of the TV. In some cases, the program our course oversees is the only connection they have to the natural world.”

The Legacy Club hosts field trips for the kids to show them the enhancements the maintenance staff has made to the course: natural corridors for animals to migrate through, acres of lakes to provide homes for waterfowl and an integrated

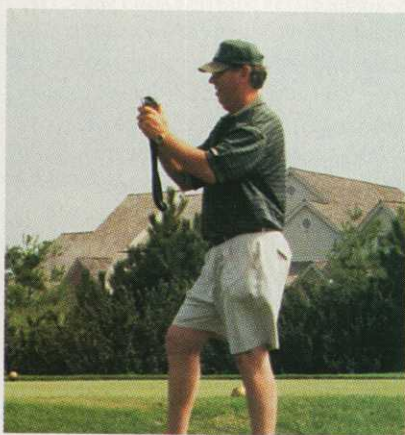


John Kopack met with Nancy Richardson, his Audubon International monitor, at the GCSAA show in February.

pest management program that helps reduce chemical application. Its program has raised the profile of the course in the community by word of mouth.

“These kids tell their parents about us, the parents tell their friends and pretty soon you’ve got a buzz going about your efforts,” Kopack says. “The Audubon guidelines are easy to follow and the positive publicity you get in return is fabulous.”

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Peter Leuzinger photographs the fairway to document his environmental efforts for his Audubon International annual audit.

1997
 Audubon International hosts Birdwatching Ryder Cup in conjunction with the European Golf Association Ecology Unit.

1999
 Audubon International begins working with the Club Managers Association of America toward developing an Environmental Performance Audit for clubs.

2001
 Audubon International wins a 2001 Environmental Quality Award from the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 2.

Dodson's Devotion

Despite recently celebrating the 10-year anniversary of Audubon International's Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, Ron Dodson still wonders what his legacy to the golf industry will be.

About 2,500 golf courses worldwide have joined the program and follow six environmental awareness principles drafted by Dodson when he founded it in 1991. Dodson also reports that nearly 20 courses now under construction have enrolled in the Audubon Signature Program, designed to help golf course developers adhere to Dodson's six principles during construction rather than waiting to implement the program afterward.

He's even been hired recently to advise Eufaula, Ala., on how the city could extend the environmental practices from its municipal golf course (a Sanctuary member) to the entire city. But Dodson still wonders: Is what he's done enough?

"We have 2,500 golf courses participating in the Cooperative Sanctuary Program," Dodson says with a wistful sigh. "But there are 17,000 golf courses in the United States. I look at those numbers and I don't know whether to be happy about the numbers we've achieved or disheartened by the number of courses we haven't convinced to join us. We'd like to have them all."



Dodson (right) knew from talking to superintendents that they didn't intend to ruin the environment.



AUDUBON INTERNATIONAL

Ron Dodson, founder of Audubon International, combined his love of nature with his love of golf to create the Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.

The idea for the Cooperative Sanctuary Program sprang from Dodson's devotion to two of his college passions: golf and biology. In the mid-1980s, Dodson heard golf courses criticized by environmental groups as anti-environmental entities that systematically poisoned the ground and the water and destroyed wildlife habitats. Dodson wanted to find a way to marry environmental stewardship and golf.

"It's true that golf courses 25 years ago didn't pay as much attention to the effect they had on the environment as much as they should have," Dodson says. "Back then, few people paid attention to the environment, unlike today, when it's a hot-button political issue. But I believed most superintendents were environmentalists at heart, and I wanted to help them fight the incorrect image with which they were saddled by the public."

At first, superintendents were skeptical of Dodson's efforts, since they learned in the late 1980s and early 1990s to fear anyone from an environmental organization.

"It took a while for superintendents to understand I was there to help them, not harm them," Dodson says. "I had to convince superintendents that I wasn't pushing a radical program that would cost them their jobs. Once they understood that our program didn't prevent them from keeping their courses per-

forming at high levels, it became an easier sell."

And sell he did. Dodson, the sole employee of the original program, crisscrossed the country in 1991 with the help of the U.S. Golf Association, which initially agreed to fund the program for one year.

"I did everything," Dodson says. "I sold memberships, reviewed the application materials, wrote out action plans and talked to as many groups as I could about our plan. I didn't want to hire anyone because I wasn't sure I'd have funding after that first year."

At the end of 1991, Dodson had signed 150 members. He went to the USGA and told them he couldn't do it alone anymore. The USGA agreed and presented Dodson with a pledge of \$100,000 per year for three years. They've funded it at that level ever since.

Dodson now has 18 employees, and most are connected with the golf program. (Audubon International also sponsors a backyard environmental program to help homeowners manager their lawns environmentally. It also sponsors school and business programs.)

But Dodson himself hasn't slowed. He says he still works 20-hour days in support of the program he loves. Next year, though, he jokes that he plans on slowing down to 19-hour days.

"The golf industry is at a pivotal point in its development as it relates to the environment," Dodson says. "It's gotten its act together, and now it's time for superintendents to become environmental leaders in their communities."

— Frank H. Andorka Jr., Managing Editor

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TIM DOUBRAVA
Superintendent at Poxabogue GC,
Wainscott, N.Y.
Audubon Member: 2001

Tim Doubrava says before he came to Poxabogue GC, the previous owners sorely neglected the track. Instead of creating sensible environmental programs, they followed a program sure to cause nightmares for environmentalists everywhere: They sprayed pesticides in blanket applications, cut down trees that interfered with play and mowed all the turf in sight. It was the ultimate in managed turf, but it was bereft of character and interest for the golfer.

When the new owners hired Doubrava three years ago to oversee the course's transformation, he decided to join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary program. In the two years he's prepared for certification, the wildlife population skyrocketed — to the delight of golfers.



Tim Doubrava says superintendents are obligated to protect the environment.

"We see all sorts of wildlife, from pheasants to foxes to deer," Doubrava says. "The course even looks better now that we've allowed parts of it to return to its natural shape. The rough areas now shape the course for the golfer rather than being mowed at the same monotonous height, and the trees give a more interesting visual picture than we had before."

As an assistant, Doubrava oversaw the Audubon International at his previous

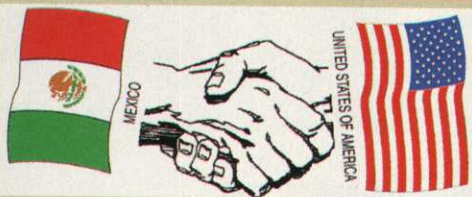
course, Atlantic GC, in Bridgehampton, N.Y. When he moved to Poxabogue, he saw the potential to implement a similar program. But Doubrava says he couldn't have implemented his ambitious program, which included building 25 bird boxes, letting much of the out-of-play areas revert to a more natural state and severely limiting chemical applications, without the backing of the course's new owners.

"They made it easy on me," Doubrava says. "I took them a list of the criteria that Audubon International has, and they told me to do whatever it took to meet those requirements."

His work has made him popular with his members.

"As soon as you start telling the story of your environmental awareness to the public, they will embrace it," Doubrava says. "Audubon International has helped make it OK to be a golf course and be environmentally sensitive, too." ■

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