

The Elusive Spring Season

By **Monroe S. Miller**, *Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club*



Wasn't it spring back in December? Was the temperature in southern Wisconsin really in the 50s in January? Why did, on some days, February feel like April?

Too often, anymore, you have to let the calendar tell you what season it is, not the weather. Since Christmas, it has been fits and starts, rain followed by a little snow followed by mid-forties temperatures. The grass has been green in places on our course most of the winter season.

The famous rodent from Sun Prairie saw his shadow on Groundhog Day, leading to the conclusion of six more weeks of winter. Six more weeks? We haven't had that much winter in total during the entire cold season.

Regardless of the mild weather, the really warm days of spring will absolutely be here soon. There aren't many frosty nights left with the air full of the delicious smell of wood smoke from fireplaces in the neighborhood. Gosh I'll miss that!

Pretty soon the winds of March and April will be doing their part in the pollination process for some trees, blowing pollen from tree flowers through the air.

It seems the weird unseasonable weather has the big Canadian honkers mixed up, too. I am convinced some of them never did go south this winter and when I have seen them of late they were mostly flying north toward Hudson's Bay.

Aldo Leopold always said the surest sign of spring was a skein of geese flying north. Professor Leopold, by the way, is the one who studied the Canada's and their families. He confirmed the reason you occasionally see a lone bird at the edge of the flock. They are the single

survivors of families that flew south in the fall; the rest of their individual family likely were victims (poor word) of hunting or possibly some tragic accident.

Although they can present problems for a golf course, they are beautiful animals that seem to provide road signs to two of our four seasons.

Soon enough the days will be warm, bringing the bobwhites and the mourning doves, buds and spring break, and golf players. And before you can catch your breath we will move headlong into summer and another golf season on Wisconsin golf courses.

May it be our best ever.

Golf instead of Badger State Winter Games? The prospect would have been laughable if suggested in July, but when reality rolled around, there were courses in our town open the last weekend in January and you could even rent a power cart.

Snowfall for November, December and January was well below normal, and the temperatures were well above normal and in the record-breaking range. At a point in January, Atlanta, Georgia had experienced more snow than Madison, Wisconsin! Lake Mendota, our big lake, may have been officially frozen for a few days but mostly it has been open all winter. We had 50 degree days and January and February (including a record 55 degrees on 1/27) and as I put these words on paper we still have not had a below zero temperature this winter. That has never happened before.

The Badger State Games, our multi-sport winter festival which is the largest in the country to feature

exclusively winter and ice sports, had to cancel some events for the lack of, well, winter.

I wonder if there are any red faces at the Old Farmers Almanac offices in New Hampshire. Their record for being right most of the time is marred by their forecast for this past winter. They predicted Wisconsin's temperatures for this past winter would be below normal in the north and the snowfall above normal.

Wow! Our land grant college – the University of Wisconsin in Madison – has moved up to second place among US universities in research spending. During the 1999-2000 school year the UW – Madison spent \$554.4 million on research and development.

The only university surpassing the UW – Madison was Johns Hopkins, which spent a whopping \$901 million because they have an applied physics lab that does classified research for the Pentagon. The University of Michigan, UCLA, and the University of Washington in Seattle followed Wisconsin, in that order.

The good news continued in January when it was reported that the UW – Madison was 4% ahead of last year in research grants. The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences is getting its share, garnering 15% of the total outside awards.

The statistics speak volumes about the quality of the faculty and staff at Wisconsin and is a measure of enormous success in the effort to make life better for all of the world's citizens.

Wisconsin lost two important emeritus faculty members this past

winter. I was lucky enough to sit the classroom of each of them as a student at Wisconsin.

Dr. Gerald Gerloff was a professor in the Botany Department. His research interest was plant nutrition, no surprise when you consider he received his PhD in Soil Science at the UW – Madison. He also did postdoc work under the famed Folke Skoog of the Botany Department. Dr. Skoog is known for his research of plant hormones. I remember Dr. Gerloff as an unassuming, friendly person who always was helpful, in and out of the classroom. He was raised on a farm and educated in a one-room school in Nebraska.

What student who ever heard a lecture by Dr. Francis Hole could ever forget him? A faculty member of the Department of Soil Science at the UW – Madison, Dr. Hole was a delight. He loved the science of the soil and conveyed that to students. I recall a time in a lecture when he was wishing he could have a picture window in his basement so he could watch soil forming processes at work! He did research in the process of soil movement by earthworms, insects and other soil animals.

Dr. Hole was an accomplished violin player, which most of his students at one time or another heard him play. Dr. Hole was enthusiastic about Wisconsin soils and in 1983 he led a campaign to have the Legislature name Antigo silt loam our state soil! He also authored SOILS OF WISCONSIN, a book that deserves a place in all of our superintendent libraries.

There will never be another quite like him.

The Grass Roots won an award in the 2001 chapter publication contest sponsored by GCSAA. The winning entry was our March/April 2001 issue of the magazine. This marked 18 consecutive years the Grass Roots has been honored this way.

What is the winning formula? Teamwork. It starts with our unparalleled cadre of authors, who contribute their time and skills freely. The breadth of the material and the depth to which some of it is considered is impressive. Cartoons by STS add humor, and cover artwork by JLS invites everyone to turn the page and see what is inside. The

professional services by Kramer Printing make the final product, well, professional. Our advertisers pay the bills so each copy is yours free of charge.

From Dave Brandenburg and myself, congratulations to all those contributors. And great big thanks! ♻

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