

Cruising Into Summer

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

For the most part, the spring has been pretty good in Wisconsin for golf and golfers and golf course superintendents. There have been pockets and areas that might not feel that way – persistent drought in northwest Wisconsin and recent storms in the Green Bay area, for example – but that is always the case. Mostly, we had minimal winter injury, aerification is over and the summer staff has arrived. We will train them quickly, hope for some real stars among them, and soon enough wonder, “Where has the season gone?”

It was a colorful spring in our town, less windy than usual. The beautiful pastel blossoms seemed to persist longer this year and were the perfect complement to the many shades of light green on our course. Summer brings the deep and consistent green; I like diversity of green the young plants bring to our landscape. It fades in August and becomes spectacular in October.

It is pretty much impossible, for me at least, to sleep much past 4:30 am these days. The birds are singing up a storm and some start even earlier. Their jubilation is one

of the pleasures of early rising.

Bluebird counts seem on the rise at our course again this year. If there was ever a wildlife success story, this is it. The thrill is still there when you watch them flit from tree to tree or open a bluebird house and see a family of four little ones.

We are also seeing a rise in the number of Baltimore Orioles on our golf course; seeing or hearing one just isn't the big deal it was five years ago when a sighting was uncommon. We suffer when we find a nest on the ground, victim to a windy day.

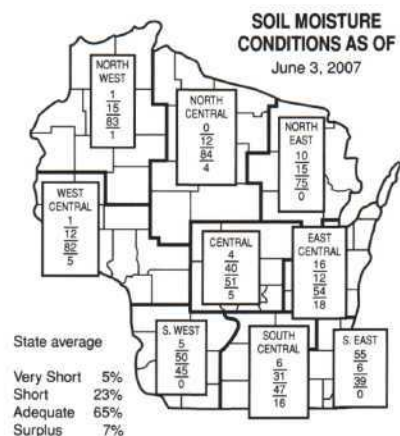
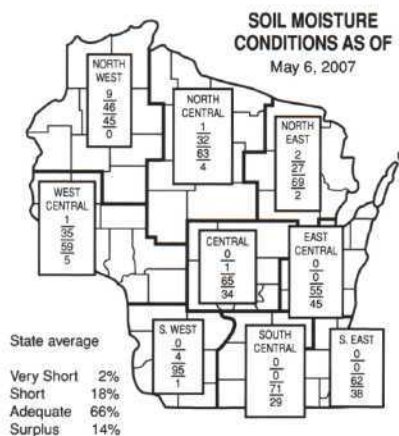
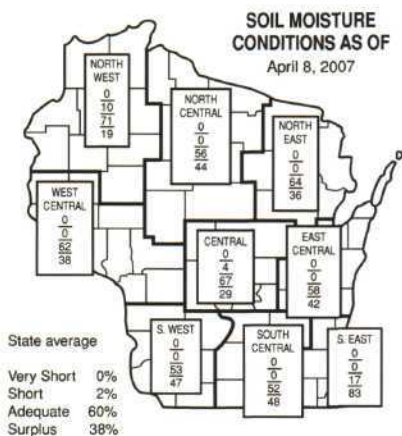
I always assumed the orioles have some long-standing relationship of some description to Baltimore, Maryland. It didn't take much research to put that notion to rest. The name ‘Baltimore’ comes from the black and orange color combo – they were the family colors of the Calverts. One member of the family, the second Baron Baltimore, was the patron of Maryland. When Linnaeus put a name on this bird, he decided to honor Lord Baltimore.

The mosquito population is also very present this spring, causing

some misery to golf players and golf course workers alike. Although I haven't noticed specifically, experts say our honeybee population is NOT experiencing a population increase. Quite the contrary, some say the numbers are seriously declining. Some losses are blamed on mites, but other bees are falling prey to a mysterious phenomenon named Colony Collapse Disorder. Bees are critical to agricultural enterprises other than actual honey production; bees are essential for crops requiring pollination.

Phil Pellitteri, WGCSA member and UW - Extension entomologist, feels this is not a new phenomenon, pointing to similar losses in 1975 and in 1963-64. He doesn't dismiss the seriousness, but doesn't know if it is cyclic, chemically caused or the result of pests. He thinks the current hysteria about the bee colony may end up being a bit overstated.

The weather data since the last issue of *The Grass Roots* is presented below, thanks to the important work of the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service.



You can always count on the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association to step up for the welfare of the turf industry in our state. Funding problems necessitated the WTA assuming the funding for the Kusow position in Soil Science; as a result Dr. Doug Soldat was hired.

That storyline is being repeated, this time in the Plant Pathology Department at the UW - Madison. The same circumstances exist, and the WTA leadership agreed to one year funding of the turf pathology position. The goal is to have the position filled by 1/1/2008. A hiring committee was formed. It has met twice, the job has been advertised and we are reviewing applications. You are represented on this committee by Dr. Chris Williamson and by yours truly. It seems to me there are talented people out there; we need to convince the best to come to Wisconsin.

Stay tuned; the news on this effort will be reported here at length and in detail.

It seems only yesterday when Pat Norton was an undergrad student, working on our golf course crew. He graduated from the UW - Madison turf program and became our assistant golf course superintendent. It was easy to see he was talented - he left to become the superintendent at South Hills CC in Fond du Lac and then Cherokee CC in Madison. Bob Lohman hired Pat as a construction superintendent and he built Cedar Creek CC in Onalaska. He loved the course and area so much he stayed on after the course was built. It took an offer from his Uncle Bob to move to Nettle Creek in Illinois, where he has been for quite a long time.

While in Madison at our course, he met his bride. He and Sue had their first child - a son John Ryan - during their stay in Fond du Lac. Cheryl and I were very flattered when Pat and Sue asked us to be godparents and we were proud to stand with them when Ryan was baptized.

The years went by and the Norton kids, about ten years behind our family, grew up and prospered. Ryan and Megan left Illinois to attend their parent's alma mater,



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the UW - Madison. The steep out-of-state tuition was moderated somewhat when both kids were accepted by the ROTC program. Dozens of times we watched Ryan at football and basketball games command the ROTC detachment that presented the colors during the national anthem. Cheryl and I were proud of the kid and could only imagine how his parents must have felt.

I received a call from Ryan this spring, asking me if I would like to participate in the ROTC commissioning ceremony in Great Hall at the Memorial Union on campus. I was stunned and flattered, and I quickly accepted. As I learned the details of the ceremony and what it was all about, I was swept with emotion and honor.

The young officer candidates recognize that much of their training was provided by noncommissioned officers, specialists and sergeants in the case of the Army. In recognition of this, each newly commissioned second lieutenant presents a noncom a coin, symbolic of his/her thanks. The noncom then gives the newly commissioned second lie-

tenant his first salute as an officer, which is smartly returned. In Ryan's case, I received a new silver dollar and gave him my best salute. It was a powerful moment for an aging Army vet who hadn't saluted anyone since leaving Vietnam in 1970.

Garrison Keillor wrote in his column a few months ago how impressed he was of our young military staff, noting he feels "small" in their presence. They are polite and helpful and disciplined and proud in service to their country. He said what I couldn't begin to say, but feel so deeply.

So, for a brief moment, I was back in time and part of an Army activity. I won't forget it. Lt. J. Ryan

Norton is headed for Ft. Lewis, Washington for part of the summer. From there it is to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma and the intense training for an artillery officer. No one knows yet where his first duty station will be, but I know this - he will be an outstanding young officer, proud and brave and deserving of the respect his unit will feel for him.

Before you know it, July 4th will be here and almost immediately after many WGCSA members will trek to Kohler and enjoy the fine work of Mike Lee, Dave Swift and their golf course staff to attend the U.S. Senior Open. It will be a highlight of the Wisconsin golf summer. 🌿



Ryan Norton, son of Pat and Sue Norton received his army officer commission from Lt. Col. John Bechtel and Cap. Ted Carter, commander of the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson.

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