

Minnesota Valley's Experience With the Audubon Program

By Mike Bohnenstingl
Minnesota Valley Country Club Superintendent

It seems that week after week we continue to hear negative publicity about the golf course industry.

Much of the criticism is unfounded and many times information is distorted to fit the agenda of a particular group or individual. Regardless of motive, one thing is evident; a good percentage of the golfing and non-golfing public believes that golf courses have negative affects on the environment. As people become more and more environmentally sensitive, these negative perceptions will only continue to grow. Therefore, we in the golfing industry need to take it upon ourselves to try and change these ideas and begin promoting the benefits golf courses provide in our communities. The place to start this education process is with our club members, and one way to do this is by joining the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

Becoming a member of the A.C.S.P. sends a positive message about your golf course. The program is a way for members to get involved and to become aware of the role golf courses play in our environment. Enrollment requires a small \$100 a year fee and does not require a huge time commitment. It is completely up to each golf course to decide just how involved it wants to become. One important thing to remember though, once participating, is to promote your efforts. This can be done in local newspapers, in monthly newsletters, with course signage, or it can be as simple as having your membership mentioned on your course score card.

Minnesota Valley Country Club joined the A.C.S.P. in 1992. Before joining, M.V.C.C. was already making efforts to protect and improve environmental quality and wildlife habitat. For example, a number of nest boxes were in place on the course and out of play areas were left to grow naturally. Since we joined the program, many more nestboxes have been added to the course, including bluebird boxes, woodduck houses, kestrel hawk houses, bat houses and martin houses. We have also placed mallard nesting platforms on our pond. Our natural areas have been expanded and now total about 10 acres. Other ideas we have implemented include establishing grass buffers around pond edges to filter runoff, creating brush piles for small animals, creating a compost pile and maintaining bird feeders all year long. We have had very limited costs associated with this program. In fact, a number of our practices have actually saved money.

During the winter of 1993-94, M.V.C.C. applied to become a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. This process required documentation of our maintenance program and environmental efforts in seven different categories: Water Enhancement, Water Conservation, Environmental Planning,



Integrated Pest Management, Public Involvement, Wildlife Cover Enhancement and Wildlife Food Enhancement. It has now been reduced to six categories. Initially we applied for all seven categories, and received certification in five. After submitting additional documentation, we quickly received certification in the sixth category.

The category we found most difficult to gain certification in was Public Involvement. We did a number of things to help us in this area. After contacting the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources we were put in touch with an Audubon committee of staff and club members. The committee works together to create new ideas for future projects on the course. Through our relationship with the wildlife refuge, we were able to become involved with a local Explorer Scout Troop. They constructed a number of nestboxes for us and will help us monitor the boxes in 1995. We also created a bulletin board in the clubhouse with a wildlife inventory list for members to record any sightings while on the course. After completing a number of these projects, we re-submitted our application and in May, M.V.C.C. became the first golf course in Minnesota and the 16th in the nation to become a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary.

Once certified, we received a beautiful Audubon wildlife print, which is on display inside the entrance of our clubhouse. With our certification we also received a press release to distribute. To our disappointment, we found little interest in the media and were only able to get it printed in local

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golf publications. Although we received minimal media attention, it was good to finally see some positive press about our industry. Hopefully as more and more courses join the A.C.S.P. or become certified, the media will give these efforts the attention they deserve.

A great deal of our success in becoming certified is due to the involvement of our crew members. They have enjoyed taking part in various projects, including an ongoing wildlife inventory list. Everyone was amazed at how many different species of wildlife we identified on the course — 50 different birds and nearly 15 mammals. Participation in this program has been fun and educational for all involved, and it has made us more aware of the environment around us. It has helped to make our jobs more enjoyable and has also given us an opportunity to stop and enjoy them once in a while. Participation has also generated quite an interest among our club members. Our certification has created a positive feeling about the golf course along with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Going through this certification process was a great exercise in evaluating our management program. Very few changes were required for us to become certified. In fact, it was just a matter of documenting what we were already doing. We see this certification as an endorsement of our program.

This winter as you sit down to make plans for the upcoming season, take the time to find out more about the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. Many of you are already making efforts to improve the environmental quality of your golf courses. It is time to start taking credit for them. Fortunately, golf courses here in Minnesota have received very little negative publicity. Now is the time to take a proactive approach to this situation. The A.C.S.P. is one way for us to do this.



1995 MGCSA MONTHLY MEETINGS

April 10	Cannon Golf Club Host Superintendent – Jeff Backstrom
May 8	River Oaks Municipal G.C. Host Superintendent – Thomas Parent
June 12	Bemidji Town & Country Club Host Superintendent – Thomas Johanns
July 10	Stillwater Country Club Host Superintendent – Kevin Clunis and TBA (Garske Scramble)
August 14	Baker National Golf Course Host Superintendent – Keith Greeninger (MGCSA Amateur Championship)
Sept. 11	Minikahda Club & Town & Country Club Host Superintendents – Douglas Mahal and Bill Larson (Stodola Scramble)
October 9	Chisago Lakes Golf Estates Host Superintendent – David Zimmer
Dec. 6, 7 & 8	MTGF/MGCSA Conference and Trade Show Minneapolis Convention Center

The Minikahda Club Recognized For Environmental Excellence

The Minikahda Club has achieved designation as a “Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary” by the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System, a program of the Audubon Society of New York State and endorsed by the United States Golf Association.

The Minikahda Club is only the second in Minnesota and among the first 30 golf courses in the nation to receive the honor.

The Minikahda Club joined the program in 1991 which provides information and guidance to golf courses to help preserve and enhance wildlife habitat and protect natural resources.

“The Minikahda Club has shown a strong commitment to its environmental program. They are to be commended for their efforts to provide a sanctuary for wildlife on the golf course property,” said Jean Mackay, Education Director for the Audubon Society of New York.

“To reach certification, a course must demonstrate that it is maintaining a high degree of environmental quality in a number of areas,” explained Mackay. These categories include Environmental Planning, Wildlife & Habitat Management, Public Involvement, Integrated Pest Management, Water Conservation and Water Quality Management.

“We are delighted with our ‘certified’ status and what we’ve been able to accomplish since 1991 toward our environmental enhancement efforts,” reported Doug Mahal, Course Superintendent at Minikahda. Mahal said that since beginning the program, many previously unrepresented wildlife species have begun residing on the property.

Minikahda’s water quality management work has included renovation of a Hennepin County drainage creek that traverses the property. Early water quality studies of this new creek now indicate that water leaving the golf course on its way to nearby Lake Calhoun is cleaner exiting the golf course than when it enters. Over 25% of all surface runoff entering Lake Calhoun is from this drainage creek.