



One Guy's Opinion

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Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program

What a Hundred Bucks Can Do!

What can a hundred bucks do? Well, they can get you a nice picture for your wall, a nice sticker for your clubhouse door and a couple of newsletters. What can a hundred bucks, some common sense and a small investment in time and money do? They can change the image of your golf course from super-fund site to wildlife oasis.

Imagine in your mind an ideal world where every golf course in the country was an active, participating member of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program of New York State, where environmentalists are handing you awards instead of trying to shut you down.

Imagine in your mind going to a social outing and not having any fear of being called a bird killer or a ground-water destroyer or a toxic polluter when you mention your profession. Instead, you could state your profession with pride and hopefully get a response of "I hear you are doing great things for wildlife and the environment."

What's involved besides a hundred dollars? For the most part, it involves not doing things as opposed to extra effort. Simple things like not mowing pond and stream banks and letting the cattails grow. Not mowing out of play areas. Putting up birdhouses which, if you have a scout troupe in your neighborhood, they're always looking for projects of this type.

That is the easy part and you have more than made up your hundred dollars due to lower maintenance costs. In addition, you've eliminated some of the most unpleasant jobs for your crew to do. Does anyone like weed whipping pond banks? Hard core ball hunters, maybe. The next phase is a little harder and could potentially have huge savings to the environment and your budget.

If you do not already have an IPM program in place, you should! Can you switch to a curative spray program for all but those pesky, patch diseases that you don't even know if you are going to get months after you need to spray? Can we eliminate the use of insecticides?

Study after study has shown again and again that all you do by spraying insecticides is throw the entire balance of predator and prey out of whack for years, leaving you open to even more dire infestations of the same pest.

By using the Audubon Sanctuary Program as a motivation to your membership or clientele, could you justify changing your management technique to reduce pesticide usage? Could you institute changes for the good of the environment that would otherwise be dismissed as substandard conditions? This could be a valuable tool to restore some sanity to how we condition our golf courses.

Simply by leaving areas alone you improve wildlife habitat. With a small yearly investment of money you can improve the habitat further by restoring small parcels of land back to native plant species. By planting varieties that benefit wildlife, you can gradually improve your course environment.

Look for articles by Lois Berg Stack and Susie Fobes in this issue and future issues. Both these authors have generously committed to writing regular articles on enhancing the environment of your golf course. The general theme of these articles is a guide for plantings of beauty and wildlife.

It is incredibly easy to comply with the principles of the sanctuary program. Mostly, it involves not doing things. If you want to become fully certified, the process does become more involved. At River Oaks, we have been a member of the sanctuary program for several years.

We have followed the concept of the program but have not followed through on the paper work and public relations part of the program needed to become certified. This will be a focus of our efforts this year.

The initial paper work is filling out a short form so the society can make recommendations on how you can improve the wildlife habitat on your course. From there you can work as closely as you wish with the society. The process of certification may or may not be important to you and you can proceed at your own pace only if you wish.

Through the sanctuary program we have been given a golden opportunity to lift ourselves up from a perceived environmental menace to steward of the land. If this is not worth a hundred dollars a year and a small amount of effort on our part, we deserve what we get in negative press.

AUDUBON COOPERATIVE SANCTUARY SYSTEM

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