

Tartan Park is a Wildlife Haven

Doubles as Golf Course and Nature Sanctuary

It's 7:00 a.m. and John Rys, a 3M retiree, starts up a golf cart to tool around the fairways at Tartan Park. His mind is on birds, not birdies. He stops at each of the small wooden boxes on poles strategically placed along the course, opens the top and peers inside.

Rys is the bluebird trail monitor – a guardian angel for the nests and nestlings inside the 46 bluebird boxes.

Each weekday morning, Cindy Diegnau, master gardener, drives into the parking lot and pulls on a pair of well-worn gardening gloves. First she checks the lush plantings around the clubhouse and then heads across the fairways. Her tools for the day include a trowel and hose to tend Tartan Park's expansive butterfly and hummingbird garden, where host plants grow alongside nectar plants creating a butterfly habitat.

Near a maintenance building, Joe Moris, facilities superintendent, beams as a foursome reports seeing a flock of wild turkeys stroll across the course. Just the day before, as he was checking one of the golf course's "no mow" areas, he spotted a red fox prowling through the high grass.

Is this a golf course or a nature sanctuary? "It's both," said Moris – a sentiment echoed by Diegnau and Rys.

Tartan Park is one of only 13 golf courses in the state certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary by Audubon International (a nonprofit group not affiliated with the National Audubon Society). Certification recognizes Tartan Park's efforts in six areas, including outreach and education, environmental planning, managing habitat for wildlife, water quality, water conservation and integrated pest management.

Coexisting with Wildlife

"We were doing many things to protect the environment and promote wildlife, even before we got involved in the Audubon Sanctuary program," Moris noted, adding that the course earned its sanctuary certification in 1999. "We're

nature activists out here and 3M has backed us all the way."

Of Tartan Park's 483 gently rolling acres, nearly 100 are dedicated to wildlife, meaning that they are off-limits to chemicals and mowers and are instead planted with bushes and trees to attract birds and animals. Moris and colleagues Randy Allen, maintenance supervisor; and Jeff Hanson, lead groundskeeper; have worked to create cover, buffer zones and wildlife corridors at Tartan Park, and are adhering to sustainable environmental practices throughout the park.

The result is an astonishing diversity of wildlife – deer, pheasant, raccoon, fox, turkey, badger, bluebirds, meadowlarks, cardinals, catbirds, eagles, osprey and hawks. Insects are thriving as well, and the butterfly census includes monarchs, black swallowtails, red admirals, buckeyes, American coppers, clouded sulphurs, mourning cloaks, spring azures, tiger swallowtails and painted ladies. Below is a list Rys and others have started of the various species of birds seen at Tartan Park.

Rys, a 32-year 3M employee when he retired in 1998 as a legal information specialist, points to the bluebird trail as a prime example of Tartan Park's accommodation of wildlife.

Bluebirds rebound "Bluebirds are cavity nesters and they rely on woodpeckers to create holes in trees – or on humans to provide nesting boxes – in order to raise their two broods a summer," Rys said. There's intense competition in the bird

world for the few available natural or man-made cavities, which is part of the reason why bluebird populations had dropped to worrisome levels in past decades. Bluebird recovery programs have inspired the creation of numerous bluebird trails in the United States and the training of volunteers, like Rys, to help promote the birds' survival.

Statistics for bluebird nesting success at Tartan Park show that almost 500 young bluebirds have fledged there – nearly 100 in 2002 alone. Once a rarity in Minnesota, bluebirds now are a familiar sight.

"The next time you're at Tartan Park for golf, archery or a picnic, look for that flash of beautiful blue so characteristic of the eastern bluebird," Rys advised.

The Birds of Tartan Park

John Rys, a 3M retiree, and others have compiled a list (below) of some of the more common birds seen at Tartan Park. Jeff Hanson, lead groundskeeper, Tartan Park, knows that with a concerted effort the list could be much longer, because more than 313 bird species are seen regularly in Minnesota. To this end, he's planning a Birder's Day at Tartan Park for 2004. Anyone interested in signing up can contact him via Lotus Notes or at (651) 736-8793.

red-winged blackbird	red-tailed hawk	common snipe
eastern bluebird	great blue heron	chipping sparrow
indigo bunting	ruby-throated hummingbird	clay-colored sparrow
northern cardinal	blue jay	field sparrow
catbird	dark-eyed junco	song sparrow
black-capped chickadee	American kestrel	white-throated sparrow
American coot	killdeer	European starling
brown-headed cowbird	eastern kingbird	barn swallow
American crow	western kingbird	tree swallow
mourning dove	horned lark	blue-winged teal
wood duck	mallard	green-winged teal
bald eagle	purple martin	brown thrasher
great egret	eastern meadowlark	wood thrush
American goldfinch	hooded merganser	wild turkey
house finch	white-breasted nuthatch	warbling vireo
purple finch	Baltimore oriole	palm warbler
northern flicker	orchard oriole	yellow warbler
flycatchers (various species)	great horned owl	yellow-rumped warbler
Canada goose	ring-necked pheasant	cedar waxwing
common grackle	eastern phoebe	downy woodpecker
rose-breasted grosbeak	American redstart	hairy woodpecker
ruffed grouse	pine siskin	pileated woodpecker
ring-billed gull	American robin	red-headed woodpecker
		house wren

(Editor's Note: For more information, contact Connie Fredkove, 3M Club Activities Coordinator at 651-736-0653 or check out <http://intranet.mmm.com/3Mclub>.)