

# Superintendent Paul Diegnau Responds To An Article Published in Bluebird News

(Editor's Note: The following "Letter to the Editor" from Paul Diegnau, CGCS, Keller Golf Course, was in response to an article appearing in the February 2004 issue of the Bluebird News.)

Dear Editor,

I have been a Golf Course Superintendent for twenty-one years and was a Master Gardener for five years. During this time I have been exposed to a wide range of opinions pertaining to pesticides and their use in our country. At the risk of generalizing, I have found individuals with strong interests in gardening, birding and the environment, to hold views that are strongly anti-pesticide. In the February, 2004 volume of Bluebird News, there was a very complimentary paragraph on the environmental work we have been and will continue to do on our golf course. I oversee a 72 box (paired) bluebird trail on the golf course where I am employed. In 2003, we fledged 65 bluebirds, 99 Tree Swallows, and 27 Black-capped chickadees, in spite of heavy house sparrow pressure. We are very proud of our trail and the many other environmental projects we are involved in on our property. Yet on the opposite side of the same page was the following:

"From Stearns County, L.E. Hinz reports having the worst bluebird season in 38 years. He reports problems with vandals, missing eggs, missing young. Tree Swallows and wrens in his boxes also seemed to be suffering the same as the bluebirds. It seems the houses are all located on a golf course where a lot of spraying is done, and the poor nesting results may have been caused by death of the adult birds. Sadly, this golf course superintendent seems to think the spraying is not hurting the birds."

So, let me get this straight...L.E. Hinz believes that "the spraying" MAY be causing the death of adult birds. This statement begs so many questions... What is L.E. Hinz's professional background? Were dead adult birds actually found on the property? Were toxicology investiga-

tions done on these dead birds to determine cause of death? What product was the superintendent spraying that is "causing the death of adult birds"? Why, after 38 years, have the bird populations only NOW been affected?

I cringe when I read statements such as the example above. Such statements are certainly subjective and void of scientific fact. To print such a statement is irresponsible journalism!

Please realize the following:

+ Any and all pesticide applications made on a golf course require the applicator to be trained, licensed and certified by the state of Minnesota. In contrast, homeowners have access to the same chemicals as golf courses, yet no training or licensing is required prior to application (food for thought).

+ Pesticide is a general term used to include all pest management products. Fungicides are designed to kill fungi, insecticides kill insects, rodenticides kill rodents, herbicides kill weeds, nematocides kill nematodes, etc. There are many types of pesticides!

+ The product label is the law! Up to 142 detailed scientific tests (including avian toxicity) are required to determine environmental impact of a product prior to release into the market. Products must be applied according to label directions and precautions noted to minimize or eliminate "non-target" environmental impact. That is why training is so important.

+ The American media operate on the premise that sensationalism sells. The truth is often boring or uninteresting and stories are crafted accordingly. All information you read is not necessarily accurate or truthful. Misinformation is every-



PHOTO BY CARROL HENDERSON

where. People and organizations can and do have agendas. Unbiased, independent University testing is what should be studied, learned and applied.

The golf course of today is very different, environmentally speaking, in comparison to golf courses thirty years ago. Today, most golf course superintendents are highly trained, educated individuals that view themselves as stewards of the environment. Integrated pest management practices are the norm. Since 1991, Audubon International has been working closely with golf courses across the United States through their Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses. This program addresses issues regarding wildlife habitat management, water quality, water conservation, IPM, environmental planning, outreach and education.

I think the time has come for "environmentalists" to take a step back and take a look at all the wonderful environmental work being done on the golf courses of today. I would ask that you use your wonderful publication to spread accurate, science-backed information and leave the opinion, falsehoods, and personal agendas on the editing floor.

And, no, Mr. L.E. Hinz, our "spraying" is not hurting the birds!

Sincerely,

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Certified Golf Course Superintendent

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