

Make a Statement in Support of Golf's Wilder Side

Inventory the wildlife on your course and let people know about golf's benefits to the environment.

BY JEAN MACKAY

Biltmore Country Club in Illinois boasts 89 species of birds, 16 different mammals, and 9 reptiles and amphibians. Vail Golf Club in Colorado provides habitat for 26 species of mammals, including the pine marten, red fox, and long-tailed weasel. During last year's North American Birdwatching Open, Gull Lake View Golf Club in Michigan counted 79 bird species in *just one day*.

Those kinds of numbers are good for golf. They help to demonstrate that golf courses offer more than lush playing fields; their woods, wetlands, prairies, streams, and ponds provide sanctuary to a great variety of wildlife. Imagine if every course kept an inventory of wildlife, just as they keep a record of chemicals and equipment. What great documentation that would be of golf's environmental benefits for skeptical reporters, regulators, critics, and the general public.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

How many species of birds and mammals inhabit your course? Which wildlife species breed there and which come for part of the year only? Which ones are common? Which are unique in your area? Which species wouldn't be on your course if you weren't providing good habitat for them?

If you're not sure or haven't kept track, it's time to develop a wildlife inventory. Recording the birds, mammals, amphibians, and other wildlife species you see is an excellent way to learn more about the wildlife value of your golf course, gauge the success of your

habitat improvement efforts, and contribute to more positive perceptions of golf courses.

A wildlife inventory is so much more than a list. It's a statement. Read between the lines and you'll find that a basic wildlife inventory communicates, "We're learning." A well-developed inventory says, "We know about wildlife, we keep track of what's going on here, and we're doing things to enhance wildlife habitats." An inventory with unusual species says, "This golf course is providing good habitat." It's fine to tell people that you care about wildlife, but it is much more impressive to document it with an inventory of 40, 60, or 100 species.

GETTING STARTED

You don't need to be an expert to begin an inventory, but you may become one as you record the species you see over time. Start by listing common species, such as the birds that visit feeders or use nest boxes on the course. Consult field guides to help you identify new species and expand your knowledge and skill. By recording species throughout the year, you'll note seasonal variations, including which species spend the winter, which ones migrate through, and which are year-round residents.

A helpful way to organize your list is to group the different species of wildlife you see according to general categories. Begin with familiar wildlife, such as mammals or birds. Later, expand your list to include species such as amphibians and reptiles, and butterflies or other insects. Your inventory can also include

the date of the sighting (or the date of the first sighting of the year) and any relevant comments, such as breeding activity or interesting behaviors. This information will tell you more about how your property is being used by wildlife and whether changes in wildlife populations are occurring from year to year.

EQUIPMENT

When it comes to identifying wildlife, your own eyes and ears are the best equipment to rely upon. With practice and heightened awareness, you can train yourself to identify birds and mammals by sound, tracks, scat, and other wildlife signs alone. The actual sighting may be the icing on the cake.

At the same time, a couple of field guides and a good pair of binoculars are most useful to have on hand. Field guides are available for all major groups of wildlife. Check out regional guides if you are a newcomer to wildlife identification, since they limit information to specific areas of the country.

ASK FOR HELP

If you're too busy (and who isn't?) to take on a project like this, delegate it to someone else. Most courses have staff, club members, or guests with knowledge and skills who can help. Developing an inventory is also a great way to reach out to community groups. Why not invite someone from a local bird club, nature center, or college biology department to record wildlife species for you? Seasoned birders are always

looking for new places to ply their skills and most will be glad to help.

Case in point: When Dave Ward, former superintendent at Olympia Fields Country Club in Illinois, contacted a local Audubon Chapter four years ago looking for someone to help him participate in the North American Birdwatching Open, expert birders Marianne Hahn, Linda Radtke, Marlys Oosting, and Penny Kneister enthusiastically volunteered. The birding team has returned each year to participate, recording upwards of 90 birds during the one-day event held each May. When Dave moved to Coyote Run Golf Course last year, the birding team continued at Olympia Fields and went to Coyote Run to inventory birds there.

Tom Atol, assistant superintendent at Braemar Golf Course in Minnesota, reached out to Karen Shragg, director of Wood Lake Nature Center, for help with a bird inventory. Karen was so impressed with what she saw on the course that she went on to assist Braemar with achieving Audubon certification. She even helped to host an event promoting the course's good stewardship to other environmental and community groups.

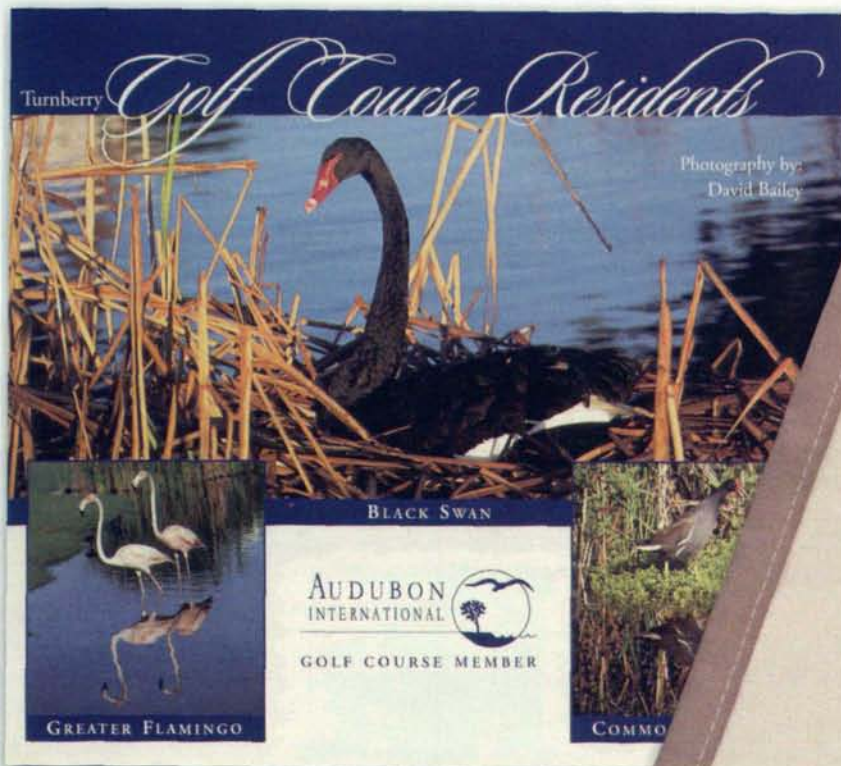
MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR INVENTORY

Once you have an inventory, don't hide it in a file drawer. At the very least, type the list and post it or frame it for people to see. Take the next step and turn it into a simple field guide for your golf

course or post it with other environmental information on the course's Web site. Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary and Signature Program members have used wildlife inventories as the basis for educational signage, displays, posters, published articles, and promotional and education guides.

Use your inventory to make a statement. Document what you have and then share it with others to let people know that you treat your golf course as the sanctuary it is.

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Superintendent David Bailey combined his interest in photography with his bird inventory to create an attractive educational guide for guests at Turnberry Isle Resort and Club in Aventura, Florida. Similarly, naturalist Dusty Durden created *A Field Guide to Oldfield* to educate residents at Oldfield residential community and golf course in Okatie, South Carolina, about the property's plants and wildlife.

