

The Benefits of Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Certification

The certification process provides environmental, educational, financial, and personal benefits.

BY FRED YARRINGTON

When a golf club considers joining the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP), it needs to fully understand the benefits it will derive from its participation, as well as the time and effort required to become a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. Becoming certified is no different from any other activity: The benefits to you are in direct proportion to the time and effort you give to the task. My perspective comes from going through the process of achieving certification at two different golf courses — one in Florida and one in Vermont.

Everything done properly to promote the growth of strong, healthy turf at minimal costs is normally of benefit to the environment. In joining the ACSP, you become part of a network of golf courses dedicated to the goal of developing environmentally sound maintenance practices that enhance and continue to improve the wildlife habitat on their properties.

The certification process is fundamentally educational. And just like any education program, the beneficiaries of the effort will be those who are involved. You will personally audit the special features of your golf course, the physical characteristics of your maintenance facilities, and the procedures and materials used in the maintenance of turfgrass.

Audubon International provides comprehensive information and documents necessary to complete the certification process. In addition, the staff is available to provide help, suggestions, and assistance when needed. Audubon

International also provides a strong support system, which includes Audubon Stewards in every state who have volunteered to assist courses interested in the program.

By completing a Site Assessment and Environmental Plan, you will gain a better understanding about environmentally appropriate procedures. The process provides a means to compare your Best Management Practices and Integrated Pest Management procedures with those considered to be effective environmental practices for the industry, and to make adjustments where needed.

The information generated will provide a form of insurance by documenting that you are protecting the environment and enhancing your property. It helps establish credible assurance that you are handling chemicals, fertilizers, and fuel in a proper manner. Likewise, you'll have reasonable assurance that you are using water efficiently and properly managing water features and irrigation sources to maintain good water quality.

It's very rewarding to demonstrate with confidence that you are providing healthy habitat for a variety of wildlife species. There is nothing more exciting than observing an increase in wildlife activity around a formerly degraded pond that has been enhanced with aquatic vegetation, or the results of creating a bluebird trail, erecting an osprey platform, or putting up a purple martin house.

You also will be offered information pertaining to Outreach and Education projects for your membership and the

community outside the club. This component of the program was something we approached slowly and carefully for the two private clubs I helped become certified. But at both courses, we have steadily increased our outreach activities. This not only has improved our members' appreciation for the nature on the course, but it also strengthened our relationships in the local community and improved perceptions of the club as a good neighbor and environmental steward.

I believe that those of us who have the responsibility to care for special acreage like golf courses have an obligation to do as much as we can to improve the environmental characteristics of the land. I personally have benefited from the satisfaction of knowing that the property of my two clubs has been improved and that the ACSP projects we have introduced will have continuing positive financial benefits to the courses. More importantly, we have improved the habitat and environment for wildlife that share the property with us, and we have created a sound foundation so that future generations will be able to enjoy the property we cared for in our time as stewards.

FRED YARRINGTON has played golf in 48 states and 20 countries, and he has spent more than 40 years as a "golf" volunteer. He currently serves as an Audubon Steward and has assisted the Hole-in-the-Wall Club in Naples, Florida, and Ekwanok Country Club in Manchester, Vermont, in achieving ACSP certification.