

Landscaping the Golf Course for Wildlife

by **RON DODSON**

President, The Audubon Society of New York State, Inc.



Breckenridge Golf Club, Breckenridge, Colorado.

MANY golf course superintendents and officials have asked, “What constitutes good wildlife habitat?” Or, even more pointedly, “What do you mean when you say create habitat on our golf course?”

Quite simply, habitat is comprised of four general categories: food, cover, water, and adequate space. These four general requirements must be met for wildlife (all kinds of wildlife) to be present in an area and to be biologically productive. It is probably quite obvious that the requirements of a large mammal, such as a deer, would be much different from those of a small songbird, but, nonetheless, all four requisites must be met for either the deer or the songbird to be present.

Within those four broad categories there are special and specific requirements which will benefit certain kinds of wildlife — certain plant species, particular kinds of cover, or specific nest areas, for example. Also, there are special kinds of projects that the superintendent can undertake to enhance certain habitats and consequently benefit certain wildlife species. The “components of habitat” are divided into approximately 16 areas. To increase the effectiveness of one’s efforts at enhancing wildlife habitat on a golf course, it is important to “mix” the habitat components throughout the property and throughout the year. The 16 components of wildlife habitat are:

- Conifers
- Grasses and legumes

- Butterfly, bee, and moth plants
- Hummingbird plants
- Summer plants
- Fall plants
- Winter plants
- Nut and acorn trees
- Feeders
- Water
- Dust beds and grit
- Salt
- Cut banks, cliffs, and caves
- Brush and rock piles
- Tree snags
- Nestboxes

The effective wildlife manager of a golf course will look for opportunities to establish or enhance any and all of these habitat components. Of course, each golf course will provide challenges for the manager because of factors such as the physical location, climatic conditions, altitude, lay of land, and even the politics of habitat enhancement. It is essential that the superintendent discuss potential changes in management practices with course supervisors. What may look nice to wildlife may not always be as pleasing to some human eyes.

Finally, many course managers have had to deal with “problem wildlife.” Sometimes the problem is too many of a certain species on the course, or a species’ use of a particular area of the golf course. The course manager should attempt to “step back from the problem” and look at it from the perspective of the wildlife. Has your management strategy created a perfect habitat for the problem wildlife? Are there subtle changes that you can make to alter the habitat in ways that will discourage use of a particular area by the species? Remember, all forms of wildlife require food, cover, water, and space. A golf course manager can use these facts to his advantage when attempting to create wildlife habitat or discouraging certain species from using a particular area.

Golf courses can play important roles in providing habitat for wildlife. In many of our urban areas, golf courses are the last remaining green space, and wildlife of all types will utilize the habitat made available by course management. In any part of the country, golf courses can help to enhance our awareness of nature, play a significant role in protecting our natural resources, and provide a useful and compatible habitat for both humans and wildlife.