

# Managing Wildlife and Habitat

*Consider the ways your course can fit into the environmental "big picture."*

by RON DODSON



*Interspersing native vegetation throughout the course not only provides a beautiful, diverse landscape, but important travel corridors for wildlife. Breckenridge Golf Club, Breckenridge, Colorado.*

**H**ABITAT. What is it? Where is it? Who's responsible for managing it? Some people seem to believe that habitat is a nesting box (what), hanging on a tree (where), that was put there by the state fish and wildlife department (who). Although this may be a popular view, managing wildlife and habitat requires a broader perspective of the needs of wildlife and a greater understanding of habitat requirements.

Habitat is the necessary biological component that all living things need to survive and prosper. To carry on the biological functions of life, all species need food, shelter, water, and space. Therefore, the nesting box described above clearly provides shelter, but it does not provide water, food, or adequate space; therefore, a nesting box is not habitat. It is merely a component of habitat.

It is important, then, to look at your property in its entirety, not just one small portion of it. In fact, it is vital to look at the entire area *surrounding* your property, including land and water that you do not own or manage. Wildlife does not recognize the artificial borders that we have established to define human land ownership. Birds merely fly, reptiles and amphibians merely crawl, and mammals merely move wherever they want to secure what they need in order to survive and carry on life. That is why the farmer's field may be an excellent feeding ground for Canada geese, but your lake or pond and mowed turfgrass may provide excellent shelter and protection as well. So the habitat you create on your golf course may be only a small portion of a much larger habitat area that extends well beyond your ownership borders. On the other hand,

some species of wildlife will never leave your property at all, and some may not even move beyond a few square yards.

Although it may be true that various government agencies have the legal responsibility for fish and wildlife regarding hunting and fishing, they are not the only people who have wildlife management responsibilities. Every one of us must shoulder responsibility in this regard. For example, local land planners who give or deny permits for construction affect wildlife and their habitats because of their decisions. Homeowners affect wildlife and their habitat by the manner in which they landscape their lawns and select materials to use in building their houses. Golf course superintendents, too, are really much more than just "keepers of the green." They are in fact natural resource managers, and the decisions that they make, or that they are guided to make by the members of their course, can and do affect wildlife and their habitats.

These decisions start right around the clubhouse with the selection of landscaping materials. Why not select plants not only for their beauty, but for their value to butterflies and hummingbirds? Why not identify out-of-play areas that are presently maintained with constant mowing and maintenance and revert these areas to native or naturalized habitat areas that will benefit wildlife? To cite another case, why not include a simple bird bath near the clubhouse for a water source? Out on the course, consider the back sides of tees as potential habitat enhancement areas. Look at the forests and fields between fairways as potential places to provide shelter, food, and even water in a way that will not diminish the game of golf, but enhance the opportunity for a variety of wildlife species to move from one part of the course to another.

Course water features can also be managed with wildlife in mind. For





Steep slopes are perfect locations for natural, "no-mow" areas.

example, creating buffer or no-mow zones around the edges of water features not only provides a buffer between managed golf areas and the water, but provides habitat for frogs, toads, turtles, and many bird species. In addition, taller vegetation around the edges of ponds and streams can create a cooling effect on the water temperature, thus benefiting many varieties of aquatic creatures, that may in turn be important food sources for fish. Placing basking logs in water features where turtles may sun themselves is an important and necessary habitat requirement for these species, and an easy project to undertake.

The most important point to remember regarding our wildlife management responsibilities is to think about the property in its entirety. Do not relegate your wildlife management efforts to a small portion of the overall property. The wildlife that uses your property is not confined merely to the areas you manage. We all manage wildlife, whether we know it or not. Every decision you make as a land manager affects wildlife. The effects can be positive or negative. The goals should be to affect wildlife and their habitat positively and blend the needs of wildlife into the overall management objectives of the game of golf. In the end, wildlife will flourish on your course, and the game of golf will be better off for your efforts.

*We are looking for slide photographs of great examples of "conservation golf holes." If you have a good slide of one of your best examples of how you have blended great wildlife habitat into your golf course, send it to: On Course With Nature, c/o The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, 46 Rarick Road, Selkirk, New York 12158. The best examples will be used in future publications to spread the word to others about your efforts.*

## Spotlight on Wildlife and Habitat Management

### The Standard Club Duluth, Georgia

The Standard Club consists of 300 acres of diverse habitat, including woodlands, lakes, ponds, and wetlands, and fields of clover, wildflowers, broomsedge, and prairie grasses. In addition to the extensive natural areas on the course, there are 60 bluebird nest boxes, as well as nest boxes for wood ducks, woodpeckers, and bats. Two large perennial gardens were planted to attract butterflies and hummingbirds, and five different feeders are provided for songbirds. Water features on the course are maintained with extensive vegetative buffers in out-of-play areas. The Standard Club's wildlife in-

ventory currently includes 36 bird species, 13 mammal species, 18 reptile and amphibian species, and 29 butterfly species. Plans for the future include restocking two ponds with bass and bream, expanding the number of nest boxes, and extending natural areas.

### Breckenridge Golf Club Breckenridge, Colorado

The diverse habitat at Breckenridge Golf Club includes coniferous woodland, lakes, streams, and freshwater wetlands featuring beavers. In addition, club staff has seeded wildflower areas, created a hummingbird garden, and planted pine, spruce, cottonwood, and aspen trees. Landscaping with native plants throughout the course provides additional food and cover for wildlife, and establishing a nest box program provides valuable sites for cavity-nesters. The success of Breckenridge's wildlife cover and food enhancement projects is illustrated by the extensive wildlife inventory that currently boasts 47 species of birds, including northern goshawks, kestrels, flycatchers, ravens, warblers, mountain bluebirds, and a great horned owl with her two fledglings.

### Gull Lake View Golf Club Augusta, Michigan

The Gull Lake View Golf Club includes five courses encompassing 860 acres of northern hardwood habitat. The site includes woodlands, tall grass, lakes and ponds, freshwater wetlands, and a creek. Their wildlife inventory includes an abundance of species, including 49 birds, 18 mammals, and more than 13 reptiles and amphibians. This year alone has featured a mating pair of red-shouldered hawks, a resident mink, and a breeding pair of red-headed woodpeckers. A unique contribution of the club has been its involvement in 15 years of Canada goose banding research in cooperation with the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary located in Augusta. In addition, Gull Lake View has had wonderful success with its nest box program for bluebirds, wood ducks, and purple martins. These boxes also serve as overwintering sites for cedar waxwings and bluebirds. Raising mowing heights around ponds and creating brush piles has also helped to provide additional cover for wildlife.

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