

LINKS-STYLE BIRDING

Results of the 1997 Ryder Cup Birdwatching Championship.

by RON DODSON



Birders gather at the 16th green of Falsterbo Golf Club, in Sweden, to observe the annual migration of many bird species. On a single day, more than a quarter of a million migrating birds can fly overhead.

THE QUESTION started out as “Where can you see the most species of birds during one day in the spring — on golf courses in Europe or golf courses in the United States?” It seemed like a simple question at the time and one that might generate some interesting information as well. That’s how the first Ryder Cup Birdwatching Championship was created in 1997.

Since 1997 is a Ryder Cup year, David Stubbs, Director of the European Golf Association’s Ecology Unit, and I thought it would be fun to develop an informal international wildlife competition to coincide with the Ryder Cup, highlighting the relationship between golf and wildlife. Besides proving that birds don’t acknowledge political boundaries, we were interested in generating usable wildlife information from golf courses in both Europe and the U.S. With those simple goals, we established some equally simple rules and defined the *playing field*.

The playing field consisted of 12 United States golf courses and 12 European golf courses chosen by the two team captains (Stubbs for the European and Dodson for the U.S.). The final site selections were based on input from a wide variety of sources. In the U.S., USGA Green Section regional directors were sent a questionnaire announcing the event and given the opportunity to nominate courses for the competition. The courses that were

finally selected were members of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System and represented a variety of geographical areas and habitat.

Once final site selections were made, the birdwatcher teams had to be assembled. At first, the U.S. and Europe decided that there would be one birdwatcher per course. For the sake of companionship and a little bit of fun, it was agreed that the *official* birdwatcher could have up to three assistants in the field.

Birdwatchers could spend up to 24 hours on their assigned course recording all of the species that could be identified. They had to see the bird species using only binoculars or identify the species by their call. Telescopes weren’t permitted, and the bird had to be identified while the birdwatcher was standing on land that was under the management of the superintendent of the golf course.

The official birdwatching day was May 21, 1997. The sites were chosen; the teams were ready; the rules were set. But one final decision had to be made for this international rivalry between Europe and America. Since the United States is home to approximately 800 species of birds and Europe has only 500 species, the European team captain wanted a handicap. I thought that the site selection process and the whims of weather would balance things out, but the Europeans held out until we reluctantly agreed to an 8-to-5 handicap.

May 22 proved to be a tense day as birders called, e-mailed, or faxed in their previous day’s results. At day’s end, it was the United States that saw the most species, but with the handicap, the Europeans won the event. The final count was 239 species for the United States and 217 species for the Europeans.

Aside from the enjoyment of everyone involved in this lighthearted competition, the event certainly showed that golf courses support a wide variety of species. For the European count, 70 species were found on four or more sites. A number of these species are listed as species of conservation concern, such as the white stork, green woodpecker, and woodlark. For the Americans, a significant percent of the species identified were neo-tropical migrants and birds of prey. More importantly, on just one day, on 12 golf courses, nearly 30 percent of the total number of birds found in the United States were seen on the golf course competition sites. That is an impressive accomplishment!

The first Ryder Cup Birdwatching Championship was a great success. In some cases, it provided golf courses an opportunity for community involvement, it provided additional information for each of the golf courses to educate their golfers about golf course habitat, and, at the same time, it contributed to a number of very interesting

questions and conclusions about the incidence of birds on golf courses. We hope competitions in the future will help to compile a stronger base of information about bird species here and in Europe.

On a personal level, given the positive responses from superintendents and birders alike, we hope it is the first

of what will become a series of international competitions that will benefit both wildlife and golf. Many thanks to all the participants for their time and effort, and thanks to the golf course superintendents for facilitating the competition at their golf courses, and for their support and continued involvement in the Audubon Coopera-

tive Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.

And congratulations to the Europeans as well. Wait until next year!

RON DODSON *captures another team in Selkirk, New York, where he directs the environmental activities and programs of Audubon International.*

THE BIRDWATCHING RYDER CUP				
EUROPEAN (Captain: David Stubbs)				
Golf Course	Country	Birdwatcher	Total Species	
Valderrama Golf Club	Spain	Martin Jacoby	48	
Club de Golf Ulzama	Spain	Antonio Rodrigues Arbeloa	101	
St. Andrews Links Trust	Scotland	Les Hatton	54	
Golf Club Du Domaine Imperial	Switzerland	Wendy Strahm	61	
Falsterbo Golfklubb	Sweden	Bjorn Malhagen	94	
Golf Course Bled	Slovenia	Janez Gregori	44	
Hensce National Golf Club	Hungary	Kallay Gyorgy	63	
Birdland Golf Club	Hungary	Tibor Kelemen	63	
San Lorenzo Golf Club	Portugal	Nuno Grade	67	
Golf Des Fontenelles	France	Theophane You	39	
Stuttgarter Golf Club	Germany	Michael Schmolz	58	
Sarfvik Golfklubi	Finland	Jan Södersved	75	
Europe's Score — Species Recorded: 217. With Handicap: 347.				
UNITED STATES (Captain: Ron Dodson)				
Golf Course	State	Superintendent	Birdwatcher	Total Species
Granite Bay	California	Jim Ferrin, CGCS	Ed Whisler	61
Golf Links at Spanish Bay	California	Ted Horton, CGCS	Don Roberson (Roxayne Spruance)	50
Stevinson Ranch Golf Club	California	George Kelley	Jim Gain	67
Arrowhead Golf Course	Colorado	Ron Sherbert	Scott Gillihan	42
Amelia Island Plantation	Florida	Ron Hill, CGCS	Pat Rider (Christina Nelson, Mike Taylor, Carol Wyatt)	69
Prairie Dunes Country Club	Kansas	Stan George	Max Terman	47
The Ivanhoe Club	Illinois	Peter Leuzinger, CGCS	Steve Bailey	81
Eagles Landing Golf Course	Maryland	Joe Perry	Catherine Waterhouse (David Ciekot)	94
Egypt Valley Golf Club	Michigan	Jeff Holmes, CGCS	Gordon Van Woekrom	64
Schuyler Meadows Club	New York	Peter Salinetti, CGCS	Charlie Rouse	67
The Club at Seabrook Island	South Carolina	Alan Pulaski	Joseph E. Stevenot (Martha Stevenot, Tom Hilton)	73
Springhouse Golf Club	Tennessee	Shelia Finney	Nancy Richardson	64
United States' Score — Species Recorded: 239.				