

# Transforming The Lakes

*Improving wildlife habitat and water quality with lake bank buffer zones.*

by **BOB MARSHALL**

**I**GM AT THE HABITAT, an 18-hole municipal course in Malabar, Florida, has more than 31 acres of lakes. Prior to 1998, all of the lake banks were maintained right down to the water's edge. This clean edge did not allow for any naturalized areas to develop along the lake banks.

After joining the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) and learning the benefits of buffer zones, we decided to let the naturalized plants take priority. It has been more than two years since we stopped using weed-eaters on the lake banks, and the results are tremendous. The plant community has flourished, resulting in more food sources and shelter for wildlife, which is now plentiful. By transforming our lakes, we're living up to our name in a whole new way.

Lake buffers enabled IGM at The Habitat to achieve its goals:

- Enhanced local biodiversity by encouraging natural plant growth.

- Improved the water quality and reduced chemical applications.

- Provided additional habitat for wildlife.

## Implementation and Maintenance

Before embarking on such a significant transformation, a communication and education strategy was in order. We educated our crew and clubhouse staff about the goals and plans of the project. Signage was erected on the golf course to try to keep golfers out of the new habitat areas. Information was added to our ACSP display to show the benefits of the buffer zones.

From there we let Mother Nature take her course – and the results were dramatic. We added four to five acres of habitat and have seen an increase in the diversity of wildlife in and around our lakes. Countless hours of labor-intensive maintenance have been saved. Our crew goes in once a year, or when necessary, to eliminate

invasive exotic plants by hand. The amount of chemicals used in and around the lakes has also been reduced.

At first – and still on occasion – golfers complain about losing balls. We always make sure to trim plants that have grown too high so they do not block golf balls. After experiencing the positive effect that the native areas have had on our wildlife and the added interest to the game of golf, golfers have come to respect what has been achieved. Our lakes are now more beautiful and diverse – they're better for wildlife, better for the environment, and better for golf.

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*Adding buffers to the water features on the golf course has resulted in more wildlife on the property. A nesting pair of great blue herons fledged two young for the first time in 2000. The project involved very little cost and actually saved the staff countless hours of labor.*

