

Proof in Hand

A proper wildlife inventory can be proof of the quality of an environmental management program.

BY ELI MCGALLIAN

Snoqualmie Ridge's bird inventory boasts 67 species, including tree swallows and violet-green swallows that are attracted to the course's nest boxes.



I've always been interested in making the TPC at Snoqualmie Ridge (Snoqualmie, Wash.) the best it can be, and, in particular, having the course serve the community as an environmental asset. But doing so takes more than just talk; it takes practice and proof.

When we initially applied for certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Golf Program, we submitted a basic list of wildlife species we'd seen on the golf course. But it seemed important to get a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the wildlife found on the course throughout the year. We also wanted to get people not normally associated with golf out on the course so they could see the kinds of things we are doing to care for the environment. A wildlife inventory would help to inform our management, as well as a skeptical public.

To accomplish this goal, we invited the East Lake Washington Audubon Society to conduct a 12-month bird

and wildlife inventory at TPC at Snoqualmie Ridge. With 12 separate visits to the course, the surveyors were bound to see more types of wildlife than with just one or two visits.

We contacted Joyce Meyer of the East Lake Washington Audubon Society, and she was very excited about the project. She and fellow Audubon member Hugh Jennings volunteered to come to the course each month to conduct the survey. They used a golf cart to go around just in front of or behind the agronomy staff. Joyce and Hugh started early in the morning and spent three to four hours each visit. They worked independently and did not disrupt the play of golf.

Joyce reported sightings verbally, when there was time to meet. But she also produced a wonderful data set, which includes the names and numbers of each bird species seen, what they were doing (e.g., perching, eating, nesting, singing, etc.), and when and where they were seen.

At the end of the 12 months, Joyce and Hugh had identified 67 different species of birds. In all, 2,841 individual birds were counted. We learned that our uncut grassland areas are used by savannah sparrows from March through September, and that western meadowlarks also benefit from the unmown areas. Our wildlife inventory will be useful for making decisions about future nest box placement, landscape plantings, and habitat management.

It was also excellent to get positive feedback from non-golfers regarding the golf course as a place for wildlife. "It was exciting to see birds such as pileated woodpecker, sora, Wilson's snipe, western sandpiper, spotted sandpiper, black-throated gray warbler, and MacGillivray's warbler," reported Joyce.

I thought of the idea of having members interested in bird watching join the surveyors only after the conclusion of the survey. This would have provided more interaction with the membership and boosted the project's



Often, local birding groups or environmental organizations are willing to volunteer their time to assist golf courses in developing bird inventories and monitoring nest boxes.



educational value. Other courses interested in this type of project might consider asking the surveyors to host a tour with golfers.

With our inventory in hand, we can continue to expand our environmental management at Snoqualmie Ridge. But we can also do something more to let

people know we're an environmental asset: prove it.

ELI MCGALLIAN is the assistant superintendent of TPC at Snoqualmie Ridge in Snoqualmie, Wash., a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary since 2000.

DID YOU KNOW?

More than 600 conservation organizations, including representatives from cooperative extension services, native plant organizations, parks, water management districts, and wildlife organizations, are directly involved with golf courses enrolled in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary and Audubon Signature Programs. In addition, more than 35 Audubon chapters and state-based Audubon societies have generously volunteered their time to assist members in developing bird inventories, monitoring nest boxes, and improving habitat for birds and other wildlife. That's great for golf! These organizations are learning firsthand about wildlife habitats on golf courses and are able to contribute their expertise to help superintendents improve them.

If you contact a local Audubon society to request help with a bird inventory, keep in mind that they may or may not be familiar with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, administered by Audubon International. That's because there are 500 Audubon societies in the United States today. Each of these groups is independent and separately incorporated, and each is free to establish its own goals, develop its own programs, and take positions regarding environmental issues. Some of these Audubon societies may have taken a stance against golf courses; others may be eager to help you.

Be sure to explain who you are and describe your involvement in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses. Ask for help with a bird inventory and explain how you plan to use the information (e.g., develop baseline information, improve habitat for specific bird species). Use the opportunity to spread the word about your environmental best practices and to learn more about the bird species that benefit from your good stewardship.

— Jean Mackay,
Audubon International