

A Blueprint for Management

Shaping the Audubon program to address golf's environmental concerns.

BY JEAN MACKAY AND JOELLEN ZEH

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP) was born in 1991 when a few hundred golf courses stepped forward to participate in the fledgling environmental education and certification program. With generous funding provided by the USGA, Audubon International crafted a program to address golf's environmental concerns and take advantage of its environmental opportunities.

As it turned out, *cooperative* was an apt part of the program's title. Audubon's biologists had a crash course in core aeration and green speed. Superintendents got smart about wildlife corridors and ecological systems. Together, they shaped a program that now serves as a blueprint for environmental management on golf courses around the world.

Today, more than 2,100 golf courses in 26 countries participate in the ACSP, while an additional 129 golf course development projects are enrolled in the Audubon Signature Program, a spin-off of the ACSP begun in 1993 that addresses the environmental aspects of development. More than half of those enrolled have developed an environmental plan to guide management of the golf course, and 504 have achieved certification for their outstanding best practices. Altogether, that represents well over 700,000 acres of golf course land, water, and wildlife habitats that are managed for the benefit of golfers and the environment.

With the aid of Audubon International programs, this progressive group of superintendents and golf course managers is setting the standard for the golf industry. Their successes

and expertise have raised the bar for how golf courses can and should be managed. Equally important, they are helping golf to achieve its goal of educating the public about its commitment to good stewardship. Consider these achievements:

- More than 500 conservation organizations are directly involved with golf courses as a result of participation in the ACSP.
- Birdwatching teams from 63 ACSP and Audubon Signature golf courses identified 304 different bird species on golf courses during the 2005 North American Birdwatching Open, a yearly tally of birds on golf courses during spring migration. Fifty-seven percent of participants saw more than 50 bird species during the 24-hour event, providing credible data about the diversity of birds that use golf course habitats.
- Case studies and published articles highlighting Audubon golf program members appear regularly in a variety of international, national, and local media, including (in 2005): *The New York Times*, *Wisconsin Trails Magazine*, *Builder Magazine*, *Golfdom*, *TGM*, *The Gainesville Times*, *Charlotte Daily Progress*, *Platinum Coast Golf*, *Gold Coast Sun*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia), and this publication, the *USGA Green Section Record*, to name a few.
- In 2004, 86 golf courses participated in Audubon International's annual Nest Box Survey, reporting a total of 5,069 birds fledged from nest boxes on golf courses.
- More than 50% of classic and modern golf courses on *Golf Digest's* Top 100 List are Audubon program members, which provides good evi-

dence that excellence in golf and excellence in environmental management go hand in hand.

Fifteen years of working cooperatively has resulted in exceptional environmental management on individual golf courses, as well as improved awareness, education, and best practices industry-wide. Still, there's more to do. More superintendents need to join the cream of the crop and implement comprehensive environmental management practices. More need to document their environmental outcomes to build a body of regional and national data. And, as always, more needs to be done to bring golfers to the table.

Audubon International is in for the long run. We look forward to the next 15 years of continued progress, on-the-ground results, and industry-wide successes to improve the quality of our environment for the benefit of the game of golf and, more importantly, for our future.

GET INVOLVED!

Taking part in the ACSP may be easier than you think. Here's a quick look at what's involved:

- **Join the program!** Submit a simple registration form and membership fee of \$150 (U.S.) to enroll. Register online or call Audubon International to request a brochure.
- **Complete a Site Assessment and Environmental Plan.** This benchmarking tool helps you evaluate your current management practices and develop a comprehensive environmental plan to guide improvements. Inherent flexibility in the ACSP is designed to help any golf course take stock of its environ-



mental resources and potential concerns, and then develop a plan that fits its unique setting, goals, staff, budget, and available time.

● **Implement your action plan.**

Delegate and work with others to implement new best practices and achieve your goals. The program includes these key areas:

- ◆ Wildlife and Habitat Management
- ◆ Chemical Use Reduction and Safety
- ◆ Water Conservation
- ◆ Water Quality Management
- ◆ Outreach and Education

● **Become certified.** ACSP members are often surprised to find that many of their day-to-day activities already meet certification requirements. Documentation and reporting for certification have been streamlined significantly since the early days of the program (thanks to feedback from ACSP members). So, if

you're lingering under the impression that you *just don't have time to participate* or *can't possibly achieve certification*, think again.

To find out more, visit www.auduboninternational.org, e-mail acss@auduboninternational.org, or call Audubon International Membership Coordinator Jen Batza at (518) 767-9051, extension 12.

Collier's Reserve in Naples, Florida, became the first certified Audubon Signature Sanctuary in 1995. Like so many members of the Audubon Signature and Cooperative Sanctuary Programs, its innovative practices and commitment to environmental quality serve as a model for others in the golf industry.

Also check out www.golfandenvironment.org, a new Web site dedicated to the game of golf and the protection of our natural environment.

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