



The Nature of the Game

Rewards of Audubon certification worth the effort

At York Downs Golf Club in Unionville, ON, a butterfly garden has been a hit and an inspiration. Literally at the grassroots level, the butterfly garden is a colourful and living example of how the environment and a golf course can work together to create an awareness of the benefits and importance of environmental projects.

Helping lead the way in the golf industry, 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 International's ecologists had a crash course in aerification and green speed. Golf course personnel 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. Doug Meyer, Superintendent at Beaconsfield Golf Club in Pointe-Claire, PC certified the club in 2003 and is a believer in the benefits. "The program makes me constantly aware of my environmental responsibilities as a superintendent. It has made me a better superintendent in that it encourages good record keeping, establishing pest thresholds and requires responsible pesticide and fertilizer application," he said.

ANY COURSE CAN DO IT

There are many myths surrounding the ACSP – it is too difficult; too costly; too time-consuming; good for other courses, but not applicable to a particular course; too restrictive; and on and on. The truth is that the ACSP addresses each golf course's unique circumstances. It has successfully worked with the smallest, most budget-restricted courses along with the high-end courses that regularly appear on various Top 100 golf course lists. Inherent flexibility in the ACSP is designed to help any golf course take

stock of its environmental resources and any potential problems and then develop a plan that fits its unique setting, goals, staff, budget, and available time. There is not one golf course that cannot ultimately be designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary.

Today, more than 250 golf courses in Canada participate in the ACSP, while an additional five golf course development projects are enrolled in the Audubon Signature Programs, a spinoff 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 over 65 have achieved certification for their outstanding best practices. That represents well over 14,500 hectares of golf course land, water, and wildlife habitats that are managed for the benefit of golfers and the environment. In addition to the 250 courses in Canada, close to another 2,000 in 25 other countries participate in the ACSP, representing well over 145,000 hectares of golf course land, water, and wildlife habitats that are managed for the benefit of golfers and the environment.

SETTING THE STANDARD

With the aid of Audubon International programs, this progressive group of golf course superintendents, managers, green committees and owners 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 72 ACSP and Audubon Signature golf courses identified 304 different bird species on golf courses during the 2007 North American Birdwatching Open, a yearly tally of birds on golf courses during



Cordova Bay Golf Course in Victoria, BC maintains bee hives and houses to provide shelter for these valuable pollinators.

spring migration. Fifty-three 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.

On the 2007 Golf Digest America's 100 Greatest Golf Courses list, 56 percent of the golf courses are Audubon International program members and 17 percent have been certified, which provides good evidence that excellence in golf and excellence in environmental management go hand in hand.

A MODEL FOR THE COMMUNITY

And the stories that come out of the efforts are inspiring. The butterfly garden at York Downs is one of them. "After writing about the hummingbird/butterfly garden project in our monthly newsletter, both the members and the staff have really taken notice," said Audubon Coordinator Lisa Stadnek. "My favourite comment is 'this is an inspiring garden'. I have answered several questions and have given out printed material on how to start a garden project like this and the plant material to choose

from." When the program is working at its best, the Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary becomes a model for the community, encouraging environmental projects far beyond its borders.

The ACSP presents a win-win opportunity for the game of golf and the environment. Members of the program frequently report:

- Enhanced natural beauty of the golf course
- Reduced water use and reduced need for expensive chemical applications
- Positive publicity for the course's pro-active environmental achievements
- Better education of course employees about habitat management, Best Management Practices, and public outreach strategies designed specifically for golf courses
- Frequent, on-going access to technical information, support, and guidance for implementing environmental projects
- Financial savings on course maintenance



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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 \$250 (US) 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 environmental resources and potential concerns and then develop a plan that fits its unique setting, goals, staff, budget, and available time. There is not one golf course that cannot ultimately be designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary.

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

Get 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 has 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.



Allowing vegetation to grow around water features, like this pond at Hartlen Point Forces Golf Course in Shearwater, NS, not only provides habitat for waterfowl, amphibians, and other wildlife, but also helps to protect water quality.

MORE TO DO

Nearly two decades of working cooperatively together 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 golf courses 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.

Audubon International is in for the long run. We look forward to 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.

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

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



JOELLEN ZEH

Joellen is the Program Manager with Audubon International, a not-for-profit, environmental education organization dedicated to educating, assisting, and inspiring millions of people from all walks of life to protect and sustain the land, water, wildlife, and natural resources around. Joellen can be reached at jzeh@auduboninternational.org.

CGSA: Keeping your Golf Course at the Top of its Game

Ask just about any golfer, novice or pro, someone who plays once a day or someone who plays once a year, and the vast majority will tell you that it's the golf course that is the most important element to their enjoyment of the game. There may be different reasons for their response. Some might like the quality of the playing surface or its consistency. Others will appreciate the beauty and the serenity of the golf course oasis. Still others will recognize the environmental value of the golf course and its contribution to air quality, water quality, plant and animal habitat protection and stress relief. At the end of the day, most people will come back to your property and spend their money because of the golf course and not because of the showers or the hot dogs!

Responsibility for your golf course requires individuals with multiple talents. They need to be part scientist, part artist, part environmentalist, part economist, part engineer and, yes, hopefully part golfer. They need to understand the game and the factors that affect the course. They need to be updated regularly on changing techniques and products, new approaches, current research, new regulations and up-to-date opportunities and the best way for all of this information to be incorporated into their day-to-day responsibilities. As a member of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association (CGSA), your superintendent has a wide array of resources readily available to make a difficult job much easier.

From our award winning Environmental Management Resource Manual to the searchable database of over 150,000 turf and golf course management related articles and research summaries, to our directory of over 1,500 colleagues who can assist your superintendent with just about any problem, all of these resources make the annual investment in CGSA membership for your superintendent an excellent business proposition. Policy statements,

annual salary and compensation data, environmental management practices, public and government relations support for the profession, education opportunities and certification programs all help to ensure that your most important asset is getting the attention that it needs and deserves.

The Canadian International Turfgrass Conference and Trade Show, held annually in early March, provides the largest and best opportunity for the superintendent and the entire management group at your course to discuss needs and financing options with everyone from the major equipment suppliers to the smallest product or service supplier that services your business. The trade show provides a comprehensive group of companies under one roof with nothing to do for two days but give you their undivided attention. Combine that with the best line-up of speakers and program materials offered anywhere in Canada and you have an exceptional value-for-dollar experience for the golf course management professional.

Golf superintendents are always trying to improve the product that you have to offer. They see things that most golfers don't and they fix or improve them even before you notice. This requires the constant juggling of economics with ecology to make sure that your course is at the top of its game. This can only be achieved through regular upgrading and updating of skills and the constant sharing of information. CGSA is the only national organization dedicated to making this happen.

If your superintendent is a member of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association, thank you for your support. If not, make an investment in their future and the success of your course. Make them a member of the CGSA today! Call Lori Micucci at 905-602-8873 ext. 226.