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## THE EUROPEAN GOLF ASSOCIATION GOLF COURSE COMMITTEE

### GOLF AND BIODIVERSITY – CASE STUDIES

Arguably more than any other sport, golf's relationship with the natural world is one of its defining characteristics. All courses have the potential to contribute to nature conservation and the promotion of biodiversity but golf courses are not automatically beneficial: attention to detail during the planning, design, construction and management phases is crucial to their potential environmental value.

There are approximately 6,800 golf courses in Europe. The average golf course takes up 60-70 hectares but typically only approximately 30-50% of this area is closely mown and maintained, so up to 70% of a well managed golf course can be used as habitat creation for wildlife.

Golf courses, new or old, can enhance the local biodiversity of an area by providing a greater variety of habitats than other forms of land use. They can also preserve sensitive habitat and the flora and fauna associated with them; often supporting protected species and vegetation.

The following examples demonstrate the biodiversity value of golf courses across Europe, highlighting:

- How golf courses can enhance and restore biodiversity when developed on other forms of land use
- The biodiversity benefits that positive management of established golf courses can bring
- The rare plants and animals that find a home on well managed golf courses.

These examples all demonstrate the value to be had from following the EGA GCC 10-step guideline towards protecting, enhancing and restoring biodiversity on golf courses.

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## ENHANCEMENT AND RESTORATION OF BIODIVERSITY

### Case study: The Castle Course, UK

The Castle Course is set on a prominent cliff top location to the south of the two of St Andrews on the east coast of Scotland.



It was constructed on agricultural land – a mix of pasture and arable cropping – officially opening for play in 2008.

Its coastal boundary abuts on to the Kinkell Braes Site of Special Scientific Interest, which supports a mosaic of habitats including salt marsh, brackish fens, base-rich flushes, neutral grassland and scrub.

Ecological assessments of the site were made as part of the planning process. Consequently, a buffer strip on the boundary of the coastal SSSI was seeded with an appropriate mix of grasses. Drainage outlets from the golf course were limited to those already in place and the filtering mechanism of the grasslands and their associated organic material will help protect the SSSI from pollution (the turf also preventing soil erosion).



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One of the key mitigation measures was for the maiden pink plant to be protected during course construction, with seed propagated for further enhancement.

The reinstatement of rough grasslands to the site has brought with it a variety of wildflowers, insects and small mammals.

Hares and ground nesting birds, such as the skylark which appears on The Birds of Conservation Concern Red List, now have suitable habitat to thrive on the site.

For further information visit [www.standrews.org.uk](http://www.standrews.org.uk) and contact xxxx at the St Andrews Links Trust. The R&A publication “A guide to the management of the links for wildlife and conservation”, produced for The Open Championship 2010, contains more on The Castle Course and is available as a downloadable pdf from [www.randa.org](http://www.randa.org)



*Photo credits: Laurie Campbell, The R&A, St Andrews Links Trust*

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## ENHANCEMENT AND RESTORATION OF BIODIVERSITY

### Case study: Le Golf National, France

Le Golf National is owned by the French Golf Federation and it hosts a European Tour event. The site of Le Golf National, to the southwest of Paris, was originally flat arable farmland.



The undulating terrain of the golf courses was created by transporting tons and tons of Parisienne building demolition material, which was capped with the preserved soil.

The Golf National has three courses; the Albatros championship course, l'Aigle and the 9-hole l'Oiselet.

In addition to providing mixed grasslands with notable wild flower content, development of the golf course has also enhanced biodiversity through the introduction of scrub, woodland and water features.

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The ffg has a publication on biodiversity and golf and is working with the French National Natural History Museum to audit the wildlife at Le Golf National. This first inventory has listed 782 species of plants and animals; 72 species of birds (compared to 43 found on adjacent cultivated land) and 107 plant species (73 on adjacent land). This survey has resulted in a change to some management practices, e.g. the timing of mowing rough grassland and how grass clippings are disposed of, which are aimed at further enhancing biodiversity. The results caused Jean-Philippe Siblet (Assistant Director, Natural Heritage Service, MHN) to comment that “golf can contribute very significantly to preserve, to even enrich the biodiversity”.



For further information, contact xxxx, at ffg. Learn more about the ffg and Le Golf National at [www.ffgolf.org](http://www.ffgolf.org)

*Photo credits: The R&A*

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### CONSERVING HABITATS AND RARE SPECIES

#### Case study: Royal Birkdale Golf Club, UK

This famous links course has hosted The Open Championship eight times and the course sits within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The club works closely with The R&A, Natural England, the UK Environment Agency and local conservation groups to restore and enhance populations of rare species such as skylark, meadow pipit, natterjack toad and sand lizard through positive habitat management.

Prior to the Open Championship in 2008, extensive surveys were undertaken to ensure that this major golfing championship caused minimal disturbance to the wildlife and their habitats. Sensitive areas were protected and staff trained to prevent harm to these creatures and their habitat.



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Habitat management includes:

- The removal of invasive trees (notably white poplar) and scrub from grassland and dune ridge areas
- Periodic raking of rough grassland to produce a less tussocky sward, with the litter being removed for composting
- Strategic management of sea buckthorn to contain its spread
- Excavation of sand between dune ridges to create new grassland for birds and naturally damp areas to rejuvenate suitable habitat for natterjacks and wetland plants.



For further information, contact xxxx, at Royal Birkdale Golf Club. Learn more about the flora and fauna of Royal Birkdale at [www.royalbirkdale.com](http://www.royalbirkdale.com)

The R&A produced a publication “A guide to the management of the links for wildlife and conservation” to coincide with The Open Championship 2008 and this is available as a downloadable pdf from [www.randa.org](http://www.randa.org)

*Photo credits: John Buckley, Laurie Campbell, The R&A*