



Naples Lakes Keeps Breaking Stewardship Barriers

In 2021, when Audubon International awarded Naples Lakes Country Club a plaque marking 20 years as an Audubon Certified Sanctuary Program for Golf member, management made sure to display it prominently and proudly so the 700-plus members couldn't miss it.

"It's posted as you walk into the clubhouse downstairs, past the administrative offices and into the pro shop," says Greg Weaver, who took over at Naples Lakes Country Club as the golf course superintendent in early 2022, working his way up from assistant superintendent since 2006.

As a member-owned private club in Naples, Florida region that's rife with great courses, Naples Lakes has much to recommend. It boasts a playable, beautiful, and wildlife-rich Arnold Palmer signature Design. It's a gated residential community that blends well into the verdant 490-acre landscape including 200 acres of protected nature preserves and lakes. The club offers activities galore and a well-established



culture of sustainability. Weaver oversaw ACSP for Golf recertification process last spring with unwavering support from the greens committee, his staff, and the community as a whole — and, as always, strong guidance from Audubon International.

"It's been good working with them. There are always changes [in requirements between recertifications], with more pressure on pollutants — some of the water testing they require

are a little [tougher], but we're sustainable and it's going to continue that way."

Weaver's quest for good water quality across the property never ceases. "We've done some lake bank reshaping over the years. We planted native grasses along the lake banks, and also have a buffer strip of grass cut to three inches, to help collect nutrients and runoff so it doesn't go in the lake."

A key element in the club's recertification was a case study built on Weaver's "Greens Biomass Enhancement" project. "We wanted to decrease the amount of granular nitrogen used on the greens and increase the quality of the organisms in the soil profile, and through increased aeration, increase quality of biomass in the soil," he said. The result was "more consistent water movement through the soil profile, better gas exchange, reduced disease pressure, and better playability for the members."

Then there's the club's commitment to wildlife habitat. On June 6, Naples Lakes joined dozens of other courses around the United



Others are among the many species calling Naples Lake home.



Naples Lake superintendent Greg Weaver spotted this black bear recently making his way through the property.

States and Canada in Audubon International's first "BioBlitz" competition since pre-pandemic days. Led by Monica Higgins, the club's recently retired second assistant superintendent, a small group of members identified a total of 391 species of flora and fauna — 272 types of plants, fungi and lichens, 45 types of birds, 41 insects and arachnids, 12 reptiles and fish, 11 mammals, seven mammals (from Brazilian Free-tailed bat to Florida black bear) and three others.

"It was only a one-day event," Weaver says. "Monica had twelve members who helped her as well. Before it was a week-long event, and member involvement has always been great — you need all eyes and ears out there for counting wildlife. I've seen all the bears, deer, and coyotes. Years ago I used to see a couple of foxes, I haven't seen them in a while, but we're very diverse."

Weaver's deep-seated love of nature and the outdoors translated well to Florida from his native Marshallville, Ohio, a tiny village where he took up golf as a youngster — his dad was an avid player and his uncle is a PGA Professional — and where he was immersed in the local farming lifestyle. "I enjoy working outside. We grew an acre of sweet corn and sold it at the road. Growing up in rural northeast Ohio, I learned a lot about gardening and turf. We grew everything under the sun. You name it, we canned and jammed it. I just enjoyed the outdoors."

By the time he found his way to Naples Lakes he was well-versed in his adopted golf-rich state's dedication to environmental stewardship.

"The state of Florida was the first one to start best management practices [for golf courses], and we

want to follow those guidelines," he says. "A lot has changed as far as using less nitrogen-based fertilizers [for instance]; we're going with bio stimulants in my greens program. There's a lot of things have changed in the last three to five years to help put fewer pollutants in the environment."

Hence Audubon International's continued tweaks to its ACSP for Golf requirements, which, Weaver says, always keep him and his staff striving for new heights in sustainability practices. "We want to do more things for the wildlife," he says. "We're looking at doing something for the ospreys. We have bluebird boxes, a bunch of purple martin locations, owl boxes. I'd like to get beehives out here as well. If you have bee boxes on property, you've got pollinators.

"As landscaping goes there's always something new and better coming along. You're constantly changing out landscaping and refreshing it. Sustainability is there not only for aesthetics, but for the wildlife as well!"

For more on Naples Lake, visit www.napleslakesfl.com.

To learn more about how your local golf course can gain recognition for your environmental efforts and learn how to expand



Just two of the many species birds recorded during Naples Lake's BioBlitz in June (Photo by Monica Higgins)

your initiatives through Audubon International's numerous environmental certifications, visit www.auduboninternational.org.

Audubon International, an environmentally focused non-profit organization, offers members numerous certifications and conservation initiatives to protect the areas where we live, work, and play. Their certifications are designed to increase environmental awareness, encourage sustainable environmental efforts, and educate both their members and their communities.



The 4th hole at Naples Lake