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GOLFERS, WILDLIFE THRIVE AT BARTON CREEK IN TEXAS

Cliff Terry

At the 4,000-acre Barton Creek Resort & Spa in Austin, Texas, it's not just golfers who enjoy the stunning landscape and native plantings on four acclaimed golf courses, but all kinds of wildlife (including two endangered species of birds).

"Austin is pretty environmentally conscious to start with," says Ken Gorzycki, Barton Creek's director of golf course management. "So we had to be very environmentally conscious from the very beginning."

Two of the courses - Fazio Foothills and Fazio Canyons - have been named the top two resort courses in Texas by the *Dallas Morning News*. Fazio Foothills features cliff-lined fairways, natural limestone caves and waterfalls, while Fazio Canyons offers numerous holes lined with red oak and sycamore trees and views of Short Springs Branch, a scenic limestone bed creek. A third course, Crenshaw Cliffside, has rolling hills, natural plateaus and native vegetation, and the Palmer Lakeside course is perched on a secluded hilltop overlooking Lake Travis, and features a cascading waterfall and native flora on its signature 11th hole.

No question that "managed areas" of golf courses have a large impact on the American landscape. A survey by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America shows that courses cover an estimated 2,244,000 total acres - an average of about 150 to 200 acres per course. Of that total, 67 percent (1,504,210 acres) is defined as managed turfgrass (greens, tees, fairways, rough, driving range/practice areas, turfgrass nurseries, clubhouse grounds).

Gorzycki says that many golf courses have undertaken a green posture. ("They don't get near the credit that they should get for taking the lead role in environmental stewardship.")

All four Barton Creek courses have been certified through Audubon International's Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses. The certification - courses pay an annual registration fee - focuses on five areas: wildlife and habitat management, chemical use reduction and safety, water conservation, water quality management and outreach and education.

Audubon International, which began in 1991, is funded in part by the United States Golf Association, and is not affiliated with the National Audubon Society ["Audubon"]. The National Audubon Society was founded in 1905 for the purpose of conserving and restoring natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife.

"Audubon is not associated with Audubon International in any way," says an Audubon official.

"We're very proud of our relationship with Audubon International," says Gorzycki. "Dealing with them has encouraged us to expand our environmental commitment. For instance, we do recycling on the property—cardboard, paper, plastic and aluminum." In addition, Barton Creek utilizes reclaimed water through its waste-water treatment plant, and also captures storm water runoff through water quality ponds, which trap impurities and contaminants. "These are recycled on the golf course for irrigation," he notes.

"We also have a lot of wild life habitat that we protect. Man, we have TONS of wildlife! We have deer, foxes, wild turkeys and two endangered species: the golden-cheeked warbler

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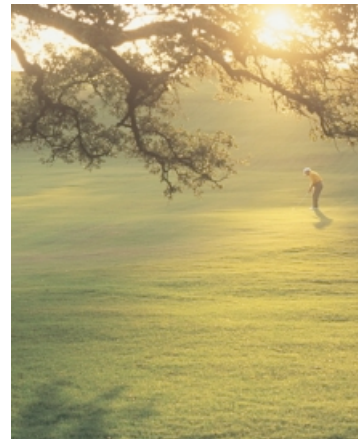
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and the black-capped vireo. We also have jackrabbits and cottontails, rock squirrels and fox squirrels. Adjacent to us is property owned by the Nature Conservancy, so there's a lot of wildlife that travels back and forth between the two properties. Also, we have native perennial plantings and wildflowers. Over on Crenshaw Cliffside there were Texas madrone trees that were protected during the construction of the course. So we've gone out of our way to protect the native prairie grasses and trees and shrubs."

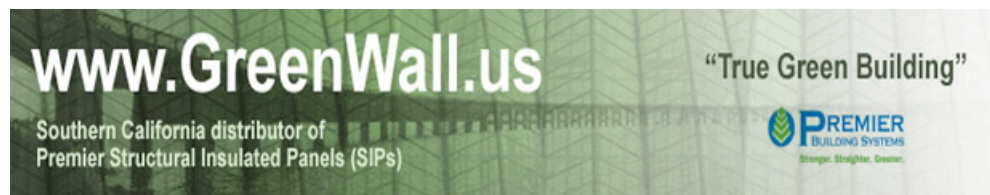
Gorzycki adds that even the equipment washing area is green. Instead of just hosing equipment down and having the runoff water go downstream, the equipment washing equipment recycles all the water. The contaminants that may come off mowing equipment are filtered as the same water is used for washing the equipment.

He concedes that over the years, golf courses have been pegged as anything BUT environmentalist.

"That's been an image that has been tough to overcome. But that's not reality at all - it's primarily perception. Especially over the last 20 years, golf courses have become much more environmentally conscious. Now, I'm sure in some past cases the mercury compounds and things weren't good for the environment," he says. "There were some products that are no longer available, for the right reasons. But products used now for pest control are very target specific. There are very low amounts of active ingredients that are used sparingly. We try to utilize the integrated pest management (IPM) programs which are not chemical-free but do reduce the amount of chemicals.

"Many golf course superintendents have degrees in agronomy and specialize in turf management. It's a specialized, very scientific field," Gorzycki points out. "The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has certification programs, continuing education programs, conferences, trade shows and seminars to keep everybody current. I mean, it's not the farmer who's mowing the grasses on the golf course anymore."

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