

A photograph of several orange poppies and a white golf ball on a red tee, set against a white background. The poppies are in various stages of bloom, and the golf ball is positioned to the right of the main cluster.

# **THE GOLF ENVIRONMENT AWARDS**

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## **PYECOMBE GOLF CLUB**

Report Date: 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015  
Consultant: Sophie Vukelic

## **CONFIDENTIAL**

**Date of Visit:** 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015

**Present:**

- Mr Simon Wells – Head Greenkeeper**
- Mr Alan Davey – Managing Secretary**
- Mr Gary Hann – Head of Greens**
- Ms Caroline Carroll – Syngenta Ltd**
- Mr Mark Ferguson – STRI Ltd**
- Miss Sophie Vukelic – STRI Ltd**

**Awards:**

- Environmental Golf Course of the Year**
- Conservation Greenkeeper of the Year**
- Outstanding Environmental Project of the Year**

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## Summary Notes

- Pyecombe Golf Club is situated in the South Downs National Park (SDNP), consisting of an 18-hole golf course rolling over undulating chalk hills.
- The course is currently managed by a small team of 5 greenkeepers in accordance with an environmental policy laid out by the course manager. A close relationship with the South Downs Way Authority means that the plan is written with high regard for the ecology of the course. Actions have been assigned to certain areas of the course to ensure a smooth running of maintenance works in areas both in and out of play.
- The extensive roughs, composed of chalk grassland and graded from semi, to long, to ecology, are cut and bailed by a local farmer twice a year and have become much thinner in doing so allowing for the establishment of natural wildflowers and orchids including early purple, pyramidal, common spotted, and bee orchid. These large patches of wildflower meadows are excellent for pollinating insects, many of which are in decline at the moment. Chalkhill blue butterflies are known to use the south facing roughs which provide both larval and adult foodplants.
- There are now 12 beehives on the course which provide a constant supply of honey which is sold in the clubhouse as 'Pyecombe Honey', further interesting the members. The staff have ensured that the hives have been placed in appropriate areas, well out of the way of play and surrounded by rich vegetation. Our other native bumblebees and solitary bees must not be forgotten however, and care should be taken when considering adding more beehives.
- Plants attractive to pollinators such as borage and wild marjoram adorn the bedding areas outside of the clubhouse – a great addition to the course where many others favour ornamental plants that are of little value to wildlife.
- The patches of woodland on the course mainly consist of native tree species including beech, oak and birch. A rolling 3 year woodland management programme has seen the opening up of some areas to create clearings, something which the staff are trained to do themselves. Timber is used for the clubhouse log burner, ecopiles, and has also been used to create a fantastic seating area.
- Bird boxes, including those for swifts, tawny owls and barn owls, have been constructed by members and volunteers and placed around the course. Creating habitats for birds in an area that is largely agricultural land is very important and Pyecombe have done a brilliant job.
- There are two ponds on the course that are teeming with wildlife. Great crested newt have been found in one pond, restricting its management by the greenkeepers but nature is coping well. Dragonflies and damselflies thrive in these habitats with emperor and ruddy darters being spotted on the visit. In the summer, look out for larval shells on the bases of reeds surrounding the edges of the ponds.
- The staff understand the importance of yellow rattle and eyebright for their hemiparasitic, sward thinning properties and encourage their establishment within roughs. The excellent management of the continuous roughs has also enhanced their ability to support a range of small mammals which have in turn encouraged buzzards, kestrels, weasels and stoats.
- The club are constantly striving to reduce their carbon footprint, one such action being the installation of a ground source heat pump outside of the clubhouse which lowers carbon emissions and supplies the heating for 40% of normal prices. The club also use local businesses where possible and are hoping to have solar panels installed in the future.
- A wildlife camera, due to its placement in a sheltered and undisturbed area on the course, has captured wonderful images of the fauna including red deer, badgers and foxes.

- Communication of the clubs environmental initiatives is achieved via email, weekly member newsletters, club website, open evenings and course walks. Using an array of platforms spread information ensures that people outside of the membership are engaged. Volunteers from SDNP help out where possible and the club have found that members are becoming more and more interested in the ecology of the course, helping out with bird box construction and ragwort pulling.
- The club have brewed their own compost teas for the past 5 years and had great results so there are now plans to hold a seminar on compost teas for 40-50 delegates/greenkeepers. Networking with others in the same business helps spread ideas and share opinions and is a great way to make new contacts.
- Water usage is kept to a minimum with the help of a weather station allowing irrigation to be tailored each day. Dry spots are also hand watered to reduce water wastage.
- Pyecombe Golf Club acts as a strong community, each member of staff is fully behind becoming more environmentally friendly and creating a course that provides a range of habitats for the surrounding wildlife. As a driving force, Simon's passion for ecology shines through and encourages others to follow the lead and make a change to people's opinions of golf courses. Pyecombe is not just a golf course, but a nature reserve too, managed to the highest of standards.

**Signed**



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