

Posted: Sat, 10/14/2017 - 11:47am

Belfair earns Audubon certification

By: BT STAFF REPORTS (/authors/bt-staff-reports)

Belfair's golf courses recently were designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, joining the ranks of 23 other courses in South Carolina.

"The Belfair Property Owners Association has shown a strong commitment to its environmental program. They are to be commended for their efforts to provide sanctuary for wildlife on the golf course properties," said Tara Donadio, director of Cooperative Sanctuary programs at Audubon International.

"To win this rigorous certification, a course must demonstrate that it is maintaining a high degree of environmental quality in a number of areas. These categories include environmental planning, wildlife and habitat management, outreach and education, chemical use reduction and safety, water conservation and water quality management."

Wildlife protection is a major emphasis of the Audubon program. According to U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services, Belfair's Hidden Lake is home to some of the most significant colonial bird rookeries in South Carolina.

Responsibilities for monitoring and maintaining these vast rookeries fall to director of golf courses and grounds Ken Lee and community volunteers. Among other steps on Belfair's path to certification were the installation of boxes for bluebirds, ducks and other migratory birds throughout the property.

Belfair's formal Christmas bird count and observation in expansive natural areas show the number of migratory birds and variety of unusual species sighted in Belfair continue to grow.

"This impressive certification is something we've been working on for a number of years, and I'm extremely proud of what we've accomplished," Lee said.

A historically-accurate rice dike was installed between a pond and the saltwater marsh on the West Course to improve water flow and quality. Another major undertaking was the dunes and naturalized sand area rejuvenation Project.

"These endeavors help reduce the run-off of nutrients and sediment and thus improve the quality of the water that empties into more than 35 lakes, lagoons, and ponds, and ultimately into our vitally important salt marsh," Lee said.

Lee said the greatest challenge has been pest control management, especially along the marsh where pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals cannot be used.

"Implementing and promoting sound environmental management practices that further our conservation efforts have been and continue to be among Belfair's most important goals," property owners association president Frank Farese said.

"Being recognized as a leader in environmental sustainability by Audubon International has been a major step toward achieving this goal. Belfair is blessed with incredible natural beauty, from our Avenue of the Oaks to our marshes along the Colleton River. Our efforts to protect Belfair's incomparable natural resources, abundant wildlife and historic and prehistoric sites, however, will not end with this benchmark."

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses is endorsed by the United States Golf Association. It provides information and guidance to help courses preserve and enhance wildlife habitat and protect natural resources. Only 909 courses

around the world have achieved the honor.



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