



Working with the BBOWT

(The trust conducted a survey at Temple GC in 2012 and this is their report)

Temple Golf Club with its backdrop of ancient beech woodlands and acres of wildflower meadows, is one of the most natural golf courses in England. For more than 100 years the golf club has provided a challenging course with smooth putting surfaces.

**Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire**



Temple has been working together with the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) on a plan aimed at improving the course for golfers and wildlife alike.

Dan Akam from the Trust explained why Temple is so important for wildlife: “The landscape of Temple is classic Chilterns, with beech and yew woodland on the hillsides and chalk grassland in the valleys. Both of these are priority habitats within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP), and it’s wonderful to see that the club treasures these special places and understands their biodiversity value,” he said.

The combination of ancient lowland beech and yew woodland with the chalk grassland contributes to the designation of the whole golf course as a Local Wildlife Site and enhances its important role as a wildlife haven within the Chilterns Escarpment Biodiversity Opportunity Area.

Since the Second World War, about 80 per cent of chalk grassland in the UK has been destroyed through intensive agricultural practices, development and mismanagement, but at Temple the club is keen to ensure that natural features such as wildflower meadows are among the highlights of a round of golf.

The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) is working with Temple Golf Club to improve the structure of the woodland, particularly Mungden Wood on the north-facing chalk escarpment, which is very similar to the nearby Bisham Woods, designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Akam explained: “The woodland areas are under-managed and will benefit from careful felling of non-native trees and removal of the dense understorey which is currently preventing the growth of woodland flowers. Like Bisham Woods, the woodlands at Temple are southern outliers of the Chilterns

Beechwoods and could develop the same diversity of wildflower species including bluebells and woodland orchids.”

The club has been carrying out ecological work in the scrub and along the boundary hedgerow. Scrub is essential habitat for smaller birds like the wren, and flocks of overwintering fieldfare and redwing that feed on hawthorn berries. Cut branches and brash is left in piles in the out-of-play areas to create ‘bug-hotels’ for insects, and the rotting wood is perfect for fungi.

The hedgerow on Temple’s northern boundary has a diversity of traditional small tree species such as hawthorn, wayfaring tree and hazel which could make it a perfect foraging area for bats and birds. The wildlife trust has therefore suggested a three-year trimming cycle, cutting a third of the hedgerow each year, using a reciprocating cutter to create an ‘A’ or dome shape about two metres wide. This will help to fill the gaps, and, when completed late in the winter, will ensure birds make the most of seeds and

berries before the nesting season starts in March.



Chalk grassland is one of the richest and rarest wildlife habitats in Western Europe and can support more than 50 different wildflower species per square metre. Temple is lucky enough to have 4.25 per cent of the total area of chalk grassland in Berkshire and nearly 50 per cent of all chalk grassland in the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead.

The colourful mosaic of flowers, grasses, butterflies and moths created alongside the fairways

are aesthetically pleasing. In spring, these meadows are carpeted with pale yellow cowslips followed by early purple orchids. During the summer months the constantly changing colours include the bright yellow of horseshoe-vetch, soft mauve of field scabious and pink and white of common rest-harrow. Dotted among the grasses are pyramidal orchids in colours varying from deep purple to pink.

These meadows attract butterflies including the marbled white (a chalkland specialist attracted to blue flowers) moths and small mammals, and of course their predators like swallows and bats foraging for flying insects, as well as red kites, sharp-eyed kestrels, and barn owls looking for shrews, voles and worms.

In fact, more than 80 bird nesting boxes, including a barn owl box, are among the trees on the course. Bat boxes on trees will encourage more bats such as the noctule and common pipistrelle, keen to forage

on midges and other flying insects especially along the hedgerow boundary and across the wildflower meadows.

The most dedicated golfing wildlife enthusiasts will notice some of the 425 species of moths including the barred rivulet, seven different species of orchids, such as green-winged, fragrant and white helleborine, and up to 24 species of butterflies that thrive at Temple. Even the rare purple emperor butterfly has been spotted feeding on mineral salts deposited near the clubhouse.

The club recognises that it is no more than a custodian of the land on which the golf course is situated and tries to ensure that as well as providing and maintaining a quality golfing facility, the land is managed sympathetically for the environment.

Golf courses have their role to play in improving biodiversity and helping wildlife withstand the pressures of development and climate change. In the UK they cover more land than national nature reserves (the nation's best examples of wildlife habitats), and because they are often located on naturally free-draining land, such as sandy heathland or chalk, there's a real potential for golf courses to make the most of this natural asset and become wildlife havens.

The out-of-play areas and surrounding woodland or hedgerows can help to make ecological networks by:

- Improving the quality of wildlife habitats – leave the ivy growing on trees, it is home and foraging territory for bugs, birds and bats.
- Extending wildlife habitats – cut the grass at the woodland edge only once a year to allow wild flowers to flourish and woodland butterflies to find nectar.
- Creating wildlife corridors – plant up or infill existing boundary hedgerows as a linear food-service station for wildlife and cut late in the winter before the bird nesting season starts.
- Creating wildlife stepping stones – allow small areas of scrub to develop in the out-of-play areas to create 'stepping stones' for wildlife to move between wooded areas.
- Creating new sites for wildlife – remove non-native shrubs and trees such as cherry laurel and cotoneaster, and replant with guelder rose, hazel and hawthorn.

Ecologists and agronomists reading this may recognise the recommendations of Professor Sir John Lawton, whose report, Making Space for Nature, published in 2010, advocates creating more, bigger, better and joined-up habitats to strengthen the UK's ecological network.

Cities and towns have expanded into the countryside around them, and the ever-increasing network of roads across the UK, have together broken up valuable wildlife habitats such as chalk grassland. All the more reason that the fragments found at Temple Golf Club must be treasured.

Wendy Tobitt is the media and campaigns manager for the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust.