

A Rough Job!



Photo 1: Eco roughs at West Lancashire GC.

The UK's ecology rough grasslands are of high value to the environment with many types of flora and fauna using them as a place to live, feed from or to simply travel through in relative safety.

In the first of this two-part blog, we look at why rough is so important for golf, wildlife and then what we can hope to find there.

There are a small number of golf clubs which I visit that have little or no rough at all – this is perfectly acceptable as the courses in question may be too small to have long grasses (which can potentially slow traffic via golfers searching for balls). Others have just a small section of rough which is way off line and poses little trouble to the golfer, both scenarios are fine as there is usually something else of environmental interest onsite such as a low lying wet hole, pond or a copse of trees which the local wildlife can use – I always find something of interest, even on the wall-to-wall mown courses, whether it be a tiny wildflower for pollinating insects or an old stone wall for invertebrates.

Back to the eco roughs; why are they important? In the summer months, we get an influx of brown butterflies including meadow brown and speckled wood which rely on our long grasses to either lay their eggs on or to use as a food source. Grasshoppers, groundhoppers and crickets need long grasses to use as a home, whereas many ground nesting birds (skylarks,

meadow pipits and terns) require tussocky grasses to make their nests in – I could go on but you get the idea.



Photo 2: Meadow brown butterfly.

In terms of actual golf play, without roughs, whether it be semi, long or eco, you would just be playing on an open park with little or no visual interest whatsoever – rough grasses make the golfer think about their shots and ball placement whilst adding graphic detail to the course, we need rough grasslands on a golf course!

But what do we expect to see growing in them? That all depends on what your underlying growing medium is, for example, a heavy clay environment could produce grasses which are undesirable for golf play such as Yorkshire Fog, Meadow Grass and many types of rush, none of which should be attracted to the in-play parts of a golf course (they do hold an interest for the earlier mentioned wildlife and can be used further off line). Sandy sub soils generally produce fine grasses such as fescues and bents which are ideal for roughs, however, these can ‘burn off’ during periods of drought then become leggy and thin to appoint where little wildlife will reside there, this is when the grasses are ideal for golf course roughs so there are always two sides to every story.

It is in the rough grasslands where you will find the more interesting wildflowers, namely orchids. This year (2017) has been exceptional for orchids as the early wet spring and warmer June/ July meant ideal growing conditions for many types of these beautiful wildflowers, you just need to find them.



Photo 3: Orchids at Whitley Bay GC.

Orchids tend to grow where golfers do not go i.e. way off line and into the rough grasslands. If you ever get a spare ten minutes (unlikely if you are a greenkeeper), then why not delve into the very long grass where no one goes and see if you can find one. Be aware however, that there may be ground nesting birds nearby so please tread carefully. Also, the dreaded horse fly has a habit of hunkering down in the rough so be warned.

Let me know if you ever find an orchid or you think you may have found a rare wildflower and I will do my best to help you identify it. Send snaps to: james.hutchinson@bigga.co.uk or @Ecology1BIGGA via twitter.

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