LIBERTY CORNER, N.J. (July 30, 2020) – As part of an ongoing investment in empowering golf courses to play an impactful role in sustainability, the USGA's multi-year collaboration with Audubon International has reached a key milestone by creating 1,000 acres of pollinator habitat on courses across America through the Monarchs in the Rough initiative.

The association's $100,000 grant, delivered through the USGA Turfgrass Environmental Research Program in 2018, has helped deliver milkweed seed and educational resources at no charge to golf courses. A significant number of the more than 700 courses that have participated in the program are open to the public or are municipally owned.

Milkweeds are the only plants that monarch caterpillars eat, which makes the plants crucial to the life and migration of monarchs each year. Monarch butterflies, as well as many other pollinators, also feed on the nectar of milkweed flowers.

Over the last two decades, the monarch butterfly population has declined by 90 percent, threatening the North American icon's existence to the detriment of the communities that rely on the benefits that they and other pollinators provide.

Beyond the natural beauty these landscape features provide golfers in out-of-play areas, these naturalized areas play a vital role in community ecosystems by providing critical habitat for other wildlife and can filter stormwater runoff, improving the quality of surface and groundwater.

"Golf courses can serve as wildlife sanctuaries when they are managed properly," said Cole Thompson, director of the Turfgrass and Environmental Research Program for the USGA. "Monarchs In The Rough has made it easier for golf courses to get involved by establishing and enhancing pollinator habitat that directly benefits their communities. The USGA is proud to champion this project as part of its ongoing commitment to sustainability and is excited by the program's progress and future goals."

The collaboration brings funding, experts and landowners together to produce a meaningful and lasting impact to communities across America. An 18-hole golf course typically provides more than 100 acres of vital green space, making it an ideal location for pollinator habitats. The USGA's investment supported a commitment of 250 acres of Audubon International's 500-acre goal, established under a 2018 grant award from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation. Additional funding came from the Environmental Defense Fund, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's New Jersey Field Office, corporate sponsors and donations from the general public.

"Audubon International is proud to be leading this exciting and unique Monarchs in the Rough partnership," said Marcus Gray, director of Conservation Initiatives for Audubon International. "We're already seeing positive results from the plantings, and interest in the program continues to grow. Our thanks go out to all Monarchs In The Rough sponsors, supporters and friends who have helped it grow so quickly but, most particularly, to the golf course superintendents, without whose efforts this work could not have been completed."

The USGA has supported the conservation efforts of Audubon International since 1991 through more than $1.5 million of grant funding. The long-standing relationship includes a $1.3 million grant toward the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, an award-winning education and certification program that helps golf courses protect the environment and preserve the natural heritage of the game. The program helps golf course managers enhance valuable natural areas and wildlife habitats, improve efficiency and protect the environment.

Audubon International was the first environmental organization to recognize the many positive impacts that sustainable golf course management can have on the quality of life, health, and economy of the communities surrounding them. The organization developed the ground-breaking book, "Sustainable Golf Courses: A Guide to Environmental Stewardship," and established environmental standards that continue to lead the golf industry's sustainability efforts today.

Since the founding of the USGA Green Section in 1920, the USGA has supported the largest private turfgrass and environmental research effort in the history of golf. The research program, which is one of several continuous Green Section efforts aimed at enhancing golf course sustainability, develops and supports efforts that produce a healthier environment and improved playing conditions.

Led by Thompson, the research program is part of the USGA's mission to champion and advance the game. Fueled by the U.S. Open, the organization annually invests more than $10 million in supporting the long-term health of golf courses.

For information on how to create monarch butterfly habit at your course or in your community, the USGA article Establishing Monarch Butterfly Habitat on Golf Courses is a helpful resource.

About the USGA

The USGA is a nonprofit organization that celebrates, serves and advances the game of golf. Founded in 1894, we conduct many of golf's premier professional and amateur championships, including the U.S. Open and U.S. Women's Open. With The R&A, we govern the sport via a global set of playing, equipment, handicapping and amateur status rules. The USGA campus in Liberty Corner, New Jersey, is home to the Association's Research and Test Center, where science and innovation are fueling a healthy and sustainable game for the future. The campus is also home to the USGA Golf Museum, where we honor the game by curating the world's most comprehensive archive of golf artifacts. To learn more, visit usga.org.

About Audubon International

Audubon International is a not-for-profit organization working to create sustainable environments in all the places where people live, work, and play. A global leader in environmental certifications, the organization provides education, technical assistance, and a set of award-winning certifications in the recreation, hospitality and community development sectors. For more information, visit www.audubonintenational.org or find us on social media (@AudubonIntl, #AudubonInternational).

For further information: Janeen Driscoll, USGA Communications, jdriscoll@usga.org, 908-326-1978

---

https://mediacenter.usga.org/press-releases?item=122794