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The weather was for the birds Thursday. So it was perfect for 17 members of the Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club and Kelowna Golf and Country Club. The birders quietly strolled through the south end of the Glenmore Drive golf course for an hour spotting 135 birds from 16 species, then they headed for the north end.

The golf club approached the naturalists last July for assistance with an environmental stewardship project in conjunction with Audubon International. Eight other golf courses in the province have Audubon certification. "This is the start of a bird checklist," explained Alice Hargreaves, chair of CONC's conservation committee. "The bird inventory will continue next spring, summer and fall so that we have a four-seasons count. That will also include the migration in the spring and fall." Thursday's bird count will also be the starting point for the naturalist club's Christmas bird count on Dec. 15 coordinated by Chris Charlesworth.

The third part will be a CONC presentation to the golf club about bird habitat on the grounds and how it can be improved. The construction of an osprey platform is one topic being discussed. The two clubs will evaluate the program at the end of the first year to decide where to go from there.

Thursday was also the first time the naturalists didn't sneak onto the golf course during the off-season. "The birders are really passionate about what they do," explained Hargreaves. "In the past, they didn't come through the front door; they came around the cemetery side. So now they have access to the whole property and they will see more birds."

Next spring, the club's botanists will conduct a plant inventory "to see how we can enhance those natural areas that have native vegetation." Hargreaves would personally like to see a small area of milkweed regenerated so it will attract the monarch butterfly which hasn't been seen in the Okanagan for more than a decade. "Biodiversity is the key. We feel we are very fortunate to be invited by the golf course to participate in their stewardship program. It's a really exciting project."

Accompanying the birders Thursday were grounds superintendent Craig Lewis and gardener Warren Reese. "The naturalists could certainly guide Warren towards plants that would be an attractant to everything from hummingbirds to butterflies," said Lewis. "Birds need places to successfully mate and food sources. We're seeing birds but insects too. Biodiversity is the key. You need to focus on the full range of insects, birds, fish and little vertebrates, mice and salamanders. Mice can be a pain but they are part of the mix." "I just don't see any downside," said David Walker, general manager of the golf club. The 120-acre golf course is not only located between Brandt's and Mill creeks, but is also at the intersection of two valleys separated by Dilworth Mountain, he noted. "I think it's just a win-win situation in all aspects. People can be out playing their game of golf and take in the sight of bird and water species. And I think it's great if we can provide a habitat for these species and allow them to move freely through those wildlife corridors."

The species spotted Thursday included: a bufflehead diving duck and mallards in the pond, pygmy nuthatches, California quail, black capped chickadees, dark-eyed juncos, brown creepers, an immature bald eagle, red tail hawk, ring-necked duck, mountain chickadee, house finches, northern flicker and a crow.