

# WHY NATURE NEEDS BIODIVERSITY CHAMPIONS MORE THAN EVER

A group of about ten people are gathered in a lush green field. Some are wearing blue shirts, others are in casual attire. One person is holding a camera, and another is looking at a bag. The background is filled with dense green foliage.

## **BIODIVERSITY** CHAMPIONS

An interview with Sophie Olejnik, Freelance Ecological Consultant

M E E T

# SOPHIE OLEJNIK

We spoke with Sophie Olejnik, Freelance Ecological Consultant at Oleo Ecology, to explore the Biodiversity Champions initiative and its role in restoring nature and shifting perceptions of the sport.

In 2022, as part of the Golf Course 2030 initiative, The R&A commissioned a five-year Golf and Nature study to document biodiversity across 27 Championship venues in the UK.

In the second year of the study, Sophie came up with the thought of appointing a volunteer Biodiversity Champion for each course.

“The idea behind it was that we wanted someone at the golf clubs to have an involvement in the project beyond just the course manager, and to give them a voice and be more involved,” Sophie states.

By making these appointments, it's hoped that when the [Golf and Nature study](#) ends in 2026, there will be a lasting legacy. The Biodiversity Champions see the golf courses regularly throughout the year and can be the eyes and ears on the ground for recording wildlife.

BIODIVERSITY  
CHAMPIONS



# A REWARDING ROLE WHERE **PASSION MATTERS MOST**

As an informal role, there are no strict eligibility criteria for becoming a Biodiversity Champion. Sophie says the most important thing is:  
**“Simply being a voice for nature in any capacity.”**

The current Biodiversity Champions come from various backgrounds. There are greenkeepers, course managers, retired members and clubhouse staff all playing important roles in raising awareness and speaking up for nature. And arguably the most critical part of the role is having a golf club that’s willing to engage, listen and implement positive changes.

The role also extends beyond the golf club, as Sophie has seen first-hand. “I think a great Biodiversity Champion should engage with the local community and conservation groups as well as the members.” A shining example of this is at Hunstanton Golf Club, where David Moss has been monitoring and recording Grey Partridge numbers on the golf course and sharing the data with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT).



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# A REWARDING ROLE WHERE PASSION MATTERS MOST

Sophie is well aware that the Biodiversity Champions aren't professional ecologists, so she supports them to ensure they don't feel like they're doing everything alone.

This includes emailing them every quarter to let them know what to look out for on their courses, sharing training opportunities, making introductions to local nature groups and being there to act as a sounding board and answer any questions.

There have also been opportunities for Sophie and some of the Champions to meet in person, namely at The R&A's and FFGolf's **Fairways to Nature Conference** and the BioBlitz events at Carnoustie Golf Links and **Lindrick Golf Club**.



# CHAMPIONING GOLF AND NATURE IN **THE WIDER WORLD**

Another benefit of clubs having Biodiversity Champions is the positive impact on golf's external reputation. "It's a fantastic role to promote and tell the wider community about because it shows a sense of care and responsibility," Sophie enthuses.

One such example is **Calum Donald**, Greenkeeper at Royal Troon Golf Club, home of The 152nd Open. His work monitoring the Small Blue Butterfly, Isle of Man Cabbage and Kidney Vetch pre- and post- Open was featured on national radio and global news outlets. This is especially important as part of the course's footprint is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).



# CHAMPIONING GOLF AND NATURE IN THE WIDER WORLD

Many of the Champions are sending their own quarterly newsletters to members to keep them informed about what's happening in nature on their courses. These are also sent to Sophie so she can stay up to date before her next scheduled visit.

Another Champion going above and beyond what's expected is **David Moss** at Hunstanton Golf Club. "He's invested in a moth trap and has been out very early and late throughout the summer to monitor and record the various species. David has also led several wildlife walks for members in all weathers to see what they can discover on the course," she notes.



# ARE YOU READY TO SPEAK UP FOR NATURE?

While fantastic progress has been made so far, plans are in place for the Biodiversity Champions initiative to continue growing as a legacy of the Golf and Nature study.

The **Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII)** by the Natural History Museum found that the **UK has just 53% of its original nature left intact**, so it's critical for golf courses to keep doing all they can to protect and restore nature.



Sophie will continue to **highlight the initiative in presentations at golf events around the UK**, and there are articles featuring four of the existing Champions to help inspire others.

“It’s worrying times for nature, so sharing these successful stories from golf, which people may not expect, can only help the industry as a whole. It also shows we’re taking things seriously and doing this work because we genuinely care, not because we have to do it,” she concludes.

**You can learn more about the successes to date by reading the case studies in the toolkit.**



The aim is to have a **Biodiversity Champion at more than just the 27 courses** that took part in the study, and extend the numbers beyond The R&A's championship venues.



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