



COVID-19 Greens Update

Some STH may have noticed irregular yellow patches, rings or arc shaped depressions on our greens recently (see figure 1). For the past ten or so years our greenkeepers have seen the yellow patches come and go to a greater or lesser extent. What I witnessed on becoming Head Greenkeeper was, to my eyes, an unusual combination of several issues, therefore soil samples were sent to laboratories. The results came back showing we had significant populations of plant parasitic nematodes (PPN). PPN are microscopic ringworms which live in the soil feeding off roots, as they feed off the roots, this turns the grass plant yellow leading to the thinning of turf on the affected areas. As the grass plant is placed into this weakened state, secondary issues (such as fungal disease) like fusarium, take all patch and anthracnose take advantage and attack the grass plant also.



Figure 1. Nematode damage on green

In days gone past, pest and disease was not so much of an issue as greenkeepers had an arsenal of pesticides to call upon, these days (and quite rightly so in some cases) we have very little. We have no registered nemacide available in the U.K and the efficacy of fungicides these days are a fraction of even ten years ago. *So what do we do?* Basically we carry on all the cultural practices we have been doing on a regular basis over the past two years, aeration, organic matter reduction/removal, de-compaction, over-seeding with fine perennial grass and a continuation of the bio stimulant program on our greens. These practices will ensure the biology of our soil is as healthy as it possibly can be withstanding pest and disease pressure more effectively. I should point out that this is no quick fix and we are always likely to see disease outbreaks when conditions are conducive such as they are this week - **relatively high humidity, little wind, heavy morning dew and east coast haar** all result in prolonged leaf wetness – perfect conditions for fungal disease to spread.

We may have also noticed a slight drop off in green speed over the past week or so. Not only is this down to weather conditions but plainly down to the lack of manpower which is finally catching us up. 12-19th August 2019 we had 416 man hours across both courses, for the same period this year we have 220 available man hours, this has been the case virtually since the return out of lockdown. We are therefore unable to carry out essential tasks which maintain the speed of our greens with such regularity, top-dressing, verti-cutting and rolling are all vital in this process and have all suffered due to the reduction in manpower. I should point out however we are far from alone, these are challenges faced by every Course Manager in the UK right now and I am certain we will emerge stronger than ever.

I am pleased to say our back 9 greens on the 1562 course have recovered quickly following our treatment to the large swathes of the weed grass Yorkshire fog. I would estimate we should see complete recovery on these areas over the next 10-14 days, freeing up an abundance of new pin positions on the back 9 greens.

Regards for now & Stay Safe

Darren McLaughlan

