

Bird Flies off with Golf Ball



I guess that there are many readers that have had their golf ball in play moved by a bird or an animal, e.g. crow, gull, dog, fox, or even a kangaroo. It has happened to me twice and it happened to Queensland professional golfer Sam Eaves last Thursday, at the Australian PGA Championship.

You can watch the crow (or was it a raven?) pick the ball off the fairway at **this link**. So, what is the ruling in this situation? The first point is that the ball does not have to be recovered. If it is known or virtually certain that a player's ball at rest has been moved by an outside agency, no penalty is incurred and either the original ball or another ball must be replaced at the spot that the ball was moved from, Rule 18-1. I have used the word 'replaced', as does the Rule, but this often causes confusion with players. A ball can only be replaced if the exact spot and lie are known. Obviously, when an outside agency has moved a ball it is highly unlikely that the player will know the exact spot or lie, as they could have been some distance away when it was moved. In a majority of cases, the exact spot and/or lie will not be determinable, which means that a ball has to be dropped as near as possible to the estimated place where it lay, Rule 20-3c, except on a putting green where the ball must be placed as near as possible to where it lay.

It is different if the ball is still in motion when it is moved by an outside agency, which is more likely to be a dog than a bird. Rule 19-1 states that if a player makes a stroke from off the putting green and their ball is accidentally deflected or stopped by any outside agency, which includes an animal picking-up the rolling ball and running off with it, it is a rub of the green, there is no penalty and the ball must be played as it lies. The ruling is different if a ball is putted from on the putting green and is accidentally deflected or stopped by any outside agency. In this case the stroke is cancelled, the ball must be replaced where the putt was taken from and replayed.

So, going back to the Sam Eaves video clip, he was permitted to drop another ball as near as possible to the place on the fairway where the crow had picked it up, without penalty.