

Native Plants & Landscaping/Wildlife



Coyote Run Golf Course and the 300 other courses in the Chicago area provide large green spaces and are important habitats for wildlife in the ever expanding urban and suburban landscape. They make up an important part of the “green” infrastructure mosaic that native fauna need to survive in this largely urban area.

When Coyote Run was constructed in 2004, careful consideration was given to creating golf course with an environment that would attract wildlife. All of the plants on the property, except the turf grasses and those used for the foundation planting at the clubhouse, are native. The flower beds on the drive into the course and around the clubhouse consist of native prairie plants. Over 15 acres of the 140 acre property are dedicated to out of play, low maintenance ‘tall grass’ areas that were planted with fescue grass. Our long term goal is to gradually convert the out of play tall grass areas to native prairie vegetation. Over the past seven years prairie seeds, harvested from the prairie flower beds, have been spread in the tall grass areas. The percentage of native grasses and flowers in the tall grass areas is now sufficient to attract more native butterflies and birds. During construction, care was taken to save as many trees as possible. Although the species mix is not ideal, when the mature trees are combined with the open space of the golf holes, a rare savannah habitat is created. Many birds, including the eastern bluebird, require savannah to survive and reproduce. All of the trees that have been planted since the course was constructed are not only native but

grown from locally harvested seed. This assures that the genetics of the new trees evolved in the same climatic conditions and with the same set of pests that they will have to contend with today. The course contains about 15 acres of lakes and lake banks that are part of a storm water management system. A vegetative buffer, consisting of taller unmaintained grasses, was planted around the five lakes on the property and native wetland plants were installed along the water’s edge to provide cover and food for wildlife. The course design also included a wetland area that filters run-off water and solved a flooding problem that had plagued our neighbors north of the course.

One current and ongoing project south of #7 green and #8 tee, is the establishment of a small woodland, complete with oak trees, woody understory plants and spring wild flowers.

The line from the movie *Field of Dreams*; “If you build it, they will come”, can be used not only to describe the golfers who play Coyote Run but also the wildlife that use the course. Almost immediately after construction was complete, birds, mammals, amphibians, and insects moved in. Over 50 species of birds, 15 species of mammals, several species of amphibians, reptiles and a myriad of insect species use the course at various times of the year. Coyotes

can be frequent the course all year but are mostly seen during daylight in the winter. One spring, two white-tailed deer fawns were born just outside the course’s maintenance building. For many years, a hive of honey bees, (non-native insects, but important none-the-less), made their home in a tree on the 7th hole. Periodically, great horned owls have nested on the course, always stealing the red-tailed hawks nest from the previous year. Occasionally, dozens of white egrets roost trees by one of the five ponds on the course. From a distance and when lit by the early morning sun, it looks like someone decorated the tree overnight with large white Christmas lights. Walk in any of the tall grass areas and you will hear a chorus of crickets and grasshoppers that attract insect eating birds. The only animals we discourage from using the course are geese, who make a fecal mess on putting greens, and non-native birds like house sparrows that we evict from our bluebird nesting boxes. Every year as the course matures and the percentage of native plants increases, several new species of mammals, birds, insects, reptiles or amphibians can be found using the course during part of their life cycles.

In 2009, Coyote Run Golf Course received a Certificate of Merit from the United States Environmental Protection Agency’s “Conservation and Native Landscaping Awards” program. The course was recognized for use of native plants, protecting and restoring ecosystems and implementation of the principles of conservation design. In particular, the course was acknowledged for the widespread use of native plants in un-mowed areas, around water features and in the restored wetland area.