

Zorro *

by Tim Anderson

Asst. Superintendent Naperville C.C.

At Naperville Country Club we recently experienced a problem with foxes digging holes in the greens. We have a large natural area which runs along the west edge of our third hole. The foxes live in this natural area. Over time, they have become very tame. They have been spotted around our maintenance facility and clubhouse area on several occasions.

Up until a few weeks ago the foxes only created minor damage on the course such as tracking or digging in the bunkers. This type of damage was easily repaired with routine maintenance. Recently the foxes have started to dig holes in two of the greens that border the natural area. Many of these holes are adjacent to sprinkler heads. We have also noted an increase in the number of spots where the fox has urinated and as a result burned the grass.

With the disruption to the putting surface, and the possibility of damaged electrical wires it became apparent that we needed to take steps to control the foxes. Since we had no prior experience with these animals we contacted the University of Illinois County Extension Agency and also put a message on Turf-talk. Both of these informational sources proved beneficial.

From a correspondence on Turf-talk we learned that the damage is concentrated around sprinkler heads because the foxes are drinking the water off of the sprinkler covers. This lead us to believe that we could deter the foxes by providing them with an alternative water source. We placed a couple of water pails in the natural area so that the foxes will no longer need to search for water.

The County Extension Service put us in touch with the Willowbrook Wildlife Haven. They informed us that the fox has no natural predators and that in most cases it acts as a predator searching out small to medium sized mammals such as moles, gophers, mice, etc. The fox has a very keen sense of smell which it uses for hunting. Its motive for digging holes in the greens is its search for food.

In order to deter the foxes the Willowbrook Wildlife Haven recommended that we either construct a barrier around the area or use of a coyote urine based scent. Fencing the area requires an "L" shaped barrier that is at least 4 feet tall and extends 1 foot out across the ground. The openings in the fence should be less than 3 inches. If the area is small enough, placing a barrier across the top of the fencing is recommended. This will prevent the fox from climbing the fence and gaining access to the area.

The Wildlife Haven also suggested trying a coyote urine based product called Garden-Guard. This product is not normally recommended for deterring predators. However, since coyote and foxes are both territorial animals they respect each others hunting grounds. If a fox smells the scent of a coyote then the fox may avoid the area.

Due to the inconvenience of fencing off two greens on a nightly basis, we decided to try the Garden-Gard. This product should be placed on a piece of absorbent material. The area is then flagged with the material so that the scent

will be picked up by the wind. We threaded 3 or 4 cotton balls on to a wire irrigation flag and then put 1 drop of Garden-Gard on each cotton ball. The flags were positioned around the perimeter of the greens at 6 foot intervals. The wire irrigation flags worked well because they placed the coyote scent at the proper height. For larger animals such as deer, the scent should be placed higher off the ground and at wider intervals. We put the flags out at dusk and picked them up the next morning prior to mowing. One employee can place the flags around both greens in 30 minutes. This method has proven to be very effective. We have flagged the effected greens with Garden-Gard on three occasions. We have not experienced any additional damage since we initiated this treatment.

This scent can also be used to protect gardens and to discourage denning. Cotton balls or cloth strips treated with the scent can be placed along the perimeter of the garden or in den holes. Since sunlight and rain cause the product to break down it may be necessary to repeat every few days.

In this environmentally conscious climate, Superintendents must exhibit resourcefulness when dealing with pest problems. As golf courses are scrutinized more closely than ever, this treatment demonstrates a commitment to acting in a responsible manner.

For more information on this product contact: Garden-Gard, Ridge-Runner Products, HRC 32, P.O. Box 90, Montpelier, VT 05620.

*Zorro is Spanish for fox!

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