

Coyotes on the Golf Course

Referred to as prairie wolves by explorers and early settlers of this area, coyotes were abundant here during the early 1800s but became scarce as the century progressed. Not until the early 1970s did coyotes make a comeback in Illinois, and their resurgence was dramatic; an estimated 30,000 coyotes now make their home in our state. Credit the coyote's adaptability to the urban environment and the elimination of competing predators such as the gray and red wolves.

Not surprisingly, coyote sightings are frequent at Chicago-land golf courses. Superintendents generally possess a keen appreciation of nature and the wildlife populating their courses; coyotes are no exception, and as an added bonus, they are an effective goose deterrent. However, studies do bear out that coyotes may compete with or kill foxes, another welcome presence on the course.

Here, MAGCS member Jon Jennings, CGCS, describes coyote encounters at Chicago Golf Club and his own fairly representative stance on the coyote issue.

We have had coyotes at Chicago Golf Club for a number of years. In 2000, there was a couple that had two pups. They lived on the west side of the golf course in a wooded section along the fence line. The coyotes roam a broad area in search of food. I have had calls from neighbors on all sides of the property stating they had seen the coyotes in their yards. The biggest concern was from neighbors that have cats.

This past year, only one or two coyotes were present on the golf course through the season. They have become so accustomed to our staff and golfers being around that you could get within 30 feet before they would run away. Last summer, as I was driving across the golf course, there was a coyote lounging on the front portion of the 15th green. A foursome of golfers was also hitting shots into the green. The coyote lay on the green even with golf balls landing all around. As the golfers walked towards the green, the coyote stood up and sashayed off toward the driving range very nonchalantly.

The coyotes can frequently be seen hunting for rodents in high-grass

areas of the golf course. It is also common to find a pile of feathers on the golf course where a bird met its fate. Last spring, we had a pair of geese and six goslings wander into our pond on the ninth hole. They were present for about a week-and-a-half before feathery piles were discovered around the pond. Needless to say, the coyotes have reduced the workload of our Border collie.

We have had members offer concern about the coyotes on the golf course. I assure them that the coyotes have no interest in humans. Nevertheless, in August 2000 we hired a wildlife specialist to trap and relocate the coyotes. The coyotes made a mockery of the trapper. Every time a

den was found, the coyotes would move and avoid being captured. After a month, he gave up and the coyotes continued to wander the course undeterred. We have never had an incident where the coyotes approached a human. They have always run away.

I have not seen the coyotes for a month or so. That seems to be their trend. They will disappear for a while, and then show up again. I feel the coyotes are very beneficial for the golf course. They have reduced the amount of nuisance animals and aside from their visual presence, they do not create any issues.



Photo by Tom Maple