

Beaconsfield Golf Club tees it up for monarch butterflies

Graham Hughes / Graham Hughes/The Gazette



Lynn Meyer tends to a butterfly-friendly garden at the Beaconsfield Golf Club.

The [Beaconsfield Golf Club](#) is renowned for its lush fairways and smooth-as-carpet greens. But the private golf course is also developing a reputation for its work with Audubon

International to help protect the environment while preserving the natural heritage of the game of golf.

The course has become a model for its [Monarchs in the Rough](#), a program that partners with golf courses across the U.S., Canada and Mexico to create “essential habitat for butterflies and increase awareness of the golf sector’s contribution to the monarch conservation challenge.”

The monarch butterfly’s population has declined by more than 90 per cent over the last two decades, but through the Monarchs in the Rough, Beaconsfield Golf Club and others course are helping to stem the decline by cultivating “monarchs butterfly garden” filled with milkweed plants, essential to the insect’s survival.

The husband and wife team of Doug and Lynn Meyer are responsible for keeping both the putting greens and monarch gardens in great shape again this summer. Doug is the course superintendent while Lynn is the club’s administrative assistant who also holds the title as Audubon program coordinator.

Aside from her administrative duties, Lynn Meyer keep an eye on the natural habitat at the course, everything from the birds’ nests to the milkweed plants that sustain the monarchs.

At a handful of locations around the course, she has helped plant monarch butterfly gardens filled with milkweed and other pollinators in out-of-play areas.

“Common milkweed, once established, it’s pretty care free,” she said. “But it takes people to be passionate about it.”

Meyer even has a little screened-in incubator cage where monarch butterflies evolve from eggs before being released. She works with a handful of other monarch conservation groups, including the [David Suzuki Foundation](#).

The golf course is also home to many different kinds of wildlife, including birds, frogs, squirrels, groundhogs, rabbits, raccoons and foxes who’ve been known to use the underground tunnel that runs beneath Highway 20, bridging the north and south sides of the course.

“We try to create travel corridors between water bodies. This golf course doesn’t have a stream or lake but we have man-made ponds and wildlife takes advantage of it,” she said “Creating travel corridors helps wildlife move safely and they don’t have to move across an open fairway and exposes themselves to predation.”

But the suburban course is surrounded mostly by residential housing, and human interaction is inevitable and not always favourable to the environment. For example, Meyer said someone deposited their gold-fish into one of the ponds which “caused a problem because it’s not a native species.”

Maintaining a delicate balance with nature is all part of the environmental management practises set out by the [Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program](#) for Golf Courses.

Everything from chemical usage, water conservation and wildlife habitat management are embraced at Beaconsfield, where course watering is now carefully measured by computer. “In the old days we watered everything; now it’s much more precise,” Lynn Meyer said.

Reduction in chemical usage is another area of advancement. “We use the least amount of chemicals as possible,” said Meyer, who added the golf industry has come a long way in regards to herbicide and pesticide usage.

“They used to (spray) fence to fence. Now they spot treat an area. “

“Every golf course has weeds, insects and diseases,” she added. “And depending on your turf and your weather, those amounts go up and down. We manage as much as we can through cultural practices. So the healthier the turf, the less chemicals you have to use.”

Even mowing practices have evolved, noted Meyer. “A lot of the milkweed and other wild flowers used to get cut down while trying to maintain a manicured look at courses,” she said.

Today’s environmental gains at Beaconsfield have been done “without impacting the golf.”

“Doug has to remind me we’re not running a park,” she said with a laugh.

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