

Golf Guide



Wildlife on the Golf Course

While golf courses' primary intention is to provide a place for people to play, they can often unintentionally serve as essential habitat for wildlife.

The types of animals that call the greens home can vary based on regions, but players should treat each with respect while present. Respecting their living space and learning to adapt to animal interference is crucial for your safety and the integrity of their environment.

According to the United States Golf Association, more than 70% of golf courses are considered non-play areas due to grasses, trees and shrubs. The rough terrains provide ideal living areas for various animals. Because most courses are built on previously uninhabitable land like landfills or vacated mining sites, renovating for the sport leads to an exemplary environment for wildlife to thrive.

TYPES OF ANIMALS

If you're traveling to unfamiliar territories to hit the links, you should be prepared to deal with animals native to the environment. From harmless mammals to dangerous reptiles, American courses are packed with up-close-and-personal wildlife encounters.



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• **Waterborne animals.** While water hazards may be golfer's worst nightmare, the lakes, ponds and oceans surround courses serve as a stable habitat for aquatic life.

• **Reptiles.** Some regions of the country offer habitats to reptiles like crocodiles, alligators and snakes. If a threat is present, approach overgrown grass and damp areas with caution.

• **Birds.** It's common to find a wide variety of birds in most environments. Avoid swinging a club if families of ducks, geese or other fowl are in your target area.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service credits golf courses with serving as an ideal location for endangered pollinators like the monarch butterfly. It's estimated that about 100,000 of the 2.5 mil-

lion acres of U.S. golf courses have the potential to become suitable habitat for essential insects.

THE RULE BOOK

Animal interaction is so common on a golf course that the USGA institutes specific rules when a ball faces interference. According to the official rule book, players qualify for penalty relief when:

• A dangerous animal (such as poisonous snakes, stinging bees, gators or bears) near a ball could cause harm a player.

• The ball is interfered with by an animal hole in the ground.

If a penalty relief shot is taken to avoid these circumstances, additional relief is available if the second swing results in the same situation.

Get Fit for a Better Game

If you're struggling to keep up with the competition on the golf course, it's a good idea to look at your fitness.

While working on your swing can do wonders, proper body condition will also play a role in controlling the ball and driving it further. To improve your game, focus on strengthening your core and flexibility.

Because a golf swing involves sudden blasts of exertions to one side of the body, muscle imbalances can lead to poor results and overuse injuries. In addition to a regular fitness plan, recreational golfers should also stick to a stretching routine to prevent damage.

Preparing your body for repeated swings will help maintain steady results throughout the nine- or 18-hole game.

INCREASE YOUR SWING SPEED

Strength and the perfect swinging stance go hand in hand. However, without working on both factors, your distance and control results will be limited. If you're experiencing slices or hooks, consider working with an instructor to master the technique of driving the ball. This will help you understand how your body's position impacts the downforce of a swing and how the ball travels.

Once you're comfortable with swinging, work on strength and flexibility to increase your quickness when bringing the club down and power without hurting your-

self. Track your progress with swing-tracking apps that identify flawed stances and reveal swing speed.

WORK ON CONTROL

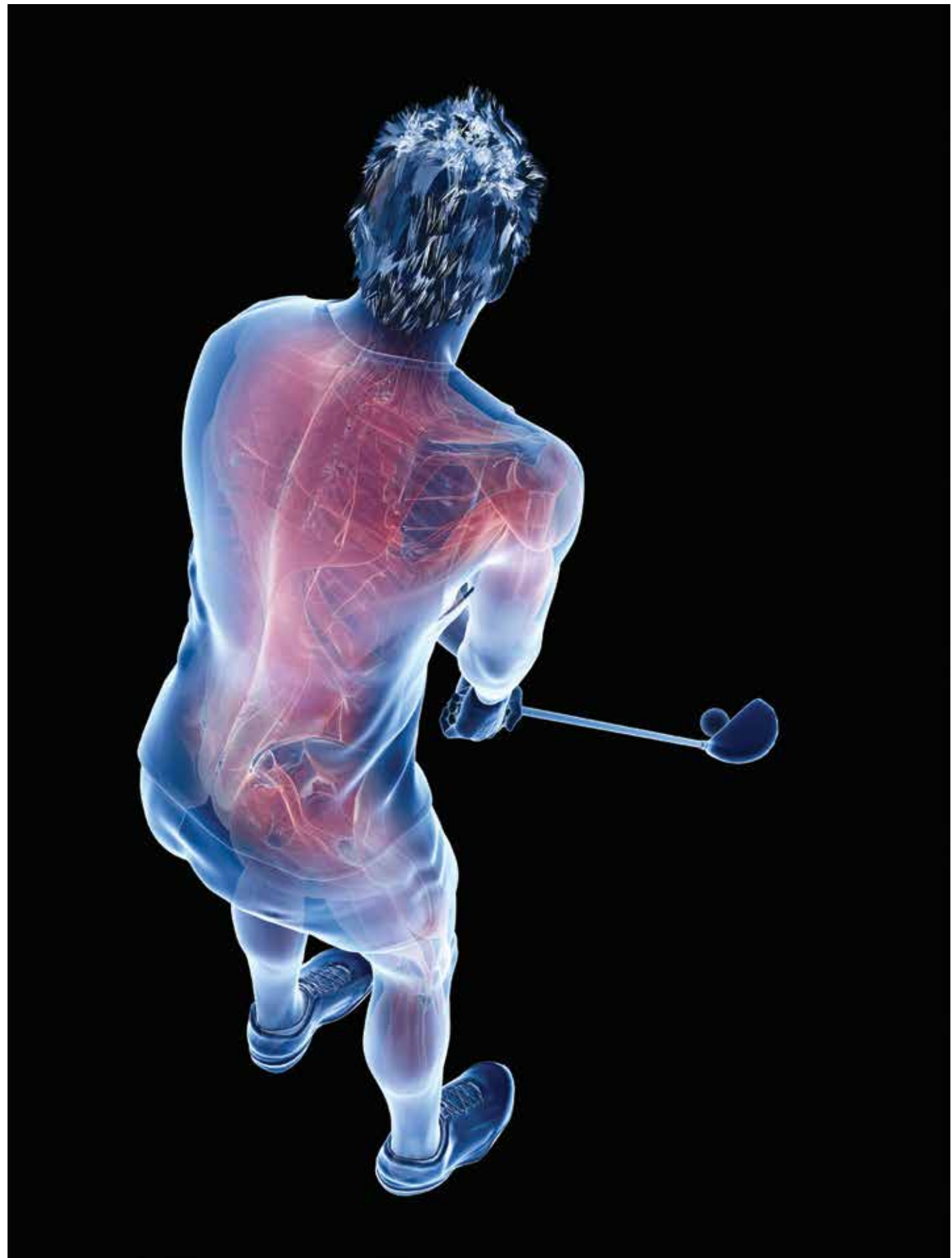
While the initial drive can make or break your performance on each hole, mastering control on the short game can help make up ground or sink a long-distance chip shot. Understanding your body's capabilities benefits your decision-making when translating your strength to the swing. Of course, dominating this part of the game requires practice to realize the relationship between your power and the club's capabilities.

IMPROVE CARDIO

Even if you spend most of your time on the golf course driving a cart, cardio is essential to teach your body to turn on and off when its performance is required. If you consider yourself out of shape, it's a good idea to become active slowly.

Consider ditching the cart and walking the course to become accustomed to physical activity.

As you build your cardiovascular routine, pick up the pace by including jogging or running to your lifestyle. A quality fitness regimen will help you gain confidence, avoid fatigue and improve your overall well-being.



Add Variety to your Game

In golf, the most common types of tournament formatting are match and stroke play.

Players compete to approach the hole in the least number of swings and avoid penalties from out-of-play shots and water hazards. While it's typically the easiest way for individuals to enjoy a relaxing day out on the links, you can spice up your game by including various competitive levels.

SCRAMBLE

If you're playing with a significant number of players, this game helps expedite your speed and encourages each player to perform their best with each swing. Teams of two, three or four golfers take a shot on the initial swing. Once everyone participates, the group decides which ball provides the best position for the next shot. The process continues throughout the hole until it is completed. Most tournaments allow players to place the ball within one club length of the chosen placement.

Scoring typically follows a stroke-play event where the lowest cumulative score after the course is finished.

BETTER BALL

Better or best ball is like a scramble, but teams swing on their own ball throughout the match rather than choosing a specific shot to play. After each



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round, the lowest number from each player is the score for the resulted total on the hole.

The game is ideal for strong players who desire to play individually against a team of less experienced golfers.

FOUR-BALL

Four-ball involves pairs of

golfers who play their ball individually rather than alternating shots. During match play, team members who complete the hole with the fewest shots win their team's point.

You can also play stroke play in this format by counting shots and using the team's best performer's score.

SKINS

A game of skins can be played individually or with teams. The team or player with the lowest score at the end of each hole is awarded a "skin." In this format, if two or more golfers tie, then no point is given, and the award carries over for the next hole.

Add a level of competitive-

ness to the game by providing monetary amounts to each skin as an incentive. It's also fun to create your own awards for long chip shots, driving the green or incredible putts. Negative points can make the game more interesting by deducting awards for water shots, bunker landings or hitting the ball out of bounds.

Tips for Finding your Ball

For serious golfers, losing a ball is more than just a headache.

Many players count the disappearance as a stroke. Being unable to find it can ruin a good game you have going, wastes time by searching and ultimately costs money as quality golf balls are sometimes expensive. Learn how to track your ball during a day on the course to avoid the frustrating and score-degrading experience.

MARK YOUR BALL

If you're a one-ball-per-game type of golfer, you may not worry about using unique identifiers. However, for most of us, the chances are that a ball will get away and sometimes require a search party before the game can resume. Using special marking patterns on the dimples or writing initials on the surface are great ways to quickly identify your equipment and get back in the game without taking a drop.

EYES TO THE SKY

After a swing, watching your ball fly in a general direction usually isn't good enough when finding it before your next shot. Unless the lawn conditions are immaculate, the ball can roll into deep rough, downed leaves or debilitating bunkers.

Without watching it land and its path, once it hits the ground, you're already at a disadvantage when approaching. Try to follow the ball at the moment of contact and analyze it while it bounces and rolls upon ground impact. If possible, use natural markers like trees, bushes or water boundaries that it landed near to remember its spot as you venture toward its direction.

CHECK DIFFERENT ANGLES

If you don't stumble across your ball after a tee swing, the shot's general area is the only advantage you have while searching. When facing this situation, walk or drive up and down the target location to gain perspective of different angles.

Sometimes, under tall grass, only a small piece of the ball will be visible. Try to be thorough with your search but understand that there should be a time limit in place to keep the game going for your companions.



Aimpoint Putting Technique

Most golf courses feature challenging greens that require a perfect approach if you hope to avoid a scenario involving several putts.

When a shot lands on a sloped green, hopes for an easy finale of the hole are often dashed. However, when you are confident in reading the greens, you can escape the situation with an admirable performance.

READING THE GREENS

Reading the greens means visually anticipating the ball's path as it ventures toward the hole. Players with experience learn the trick over time, and familiarity with the course can significantly benefit them.

One of the common mistakes amateur golfers make is waiting until they are on top of their ball before analyzing the line ahead of their shot. To get a better chance at nailing the putt, begin your read as you approach the hole.

When walking, golfers have more time to check for imperfections and slope nuances. Driving gives you less of an advantage, but if you travel toward the green at a right angle, you'll get a better perspective rather than pulling up directly behind.

Once you're set up for the putt, here are some tips to avoid overshooting the green.



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USE AIMPOINT

If you've ever watched the professionals play, you'll notice they use a system called aimpoint. Generally, golfers use their feet to estimate the amount of slope they face and determine where to aim with their arms and fingers. Here is

how it works:

- Feel the slope by walking the ball's path about halfway to the hole. Here you will determine the amount of pitch you're facing, judge it on a one-to-five scale.
- Stand behind the ball, and close one eye while holding

your pointer finger just outside the hole. Depending on the slope you estimated, put up that many fingers. Your aimpoint should be the furthest digit you hold away from the hole.

The technique is incredibly mechanical and can take years

of practice to master. However, once you're comfortable identifying slopes, it's a great tool to add to your golfing knowledge. Use these tips to make sure you're on your game when it comes time to close out a strong hole with that perfect putt.

Warm Up Before Playing

Whether you're participating in a tournament or just meeting your buddies for a weekend of golf, warming up gets your body ready to perform.

Fortunately, most courses offer preparation areas to work on your short and long game while staying out of the way of other players.

Plan to show up before your tee time to get some essential practice swings in motion. It can also be beneficial to do some non-golf warming up before a game. Try to get your heart rate up with exercise or stretching to get your body ready. You don't have to perform a strenuous workout but taking a brisk walk or doing a few squats to wake up your muscles can help avoid injury. Once your body is ready, get ahead of your competition by working on your swing.

DRIVING RANGE

The driving range is an excellent place to work on your swing and learn alterations that add distance and straighten the ball's path. When participating, work on your aim by choosing a natural target on the range like bushes or yardage signs. The field is an excellent spot to experiment with your stance and avoid losing your own balls. Don't limit your time on the range by only practicing shots with your driver. Mix it



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up by including your hybrids, woods and irons into the long-distance swings.

PRACTICE GREEN

Efficient putting can make or break your game. Take the time before teeing off to work on

your short game. Use the practice green to master long putts on slopes and shorter distances from a variety of angles. Here, you can master your stance, power and green-reading abilities and translate the knowledge during an actual game.

In addition to putting, take advantage of the space to practice chipping techniques. Place the ball off the green and use your wedges to approach the hole. Try to use different grips and angles during your downswing to analyze how each

variant changes the ball's path and direction. A quality skill to add to your chipping game are the front- and backspin. Work on achieving an optimal strike that involves hitting the ball first, then the turf to earn a valuable spin.

Support the 19th Hole

The 19th hole is one of the most enjoyable parts of golf.

After a long game, players and friends join the clubhouse to brag about their game, show off new equipment and support local business. Show your appreciation to the hard-working men and women who maintain the links by spending money within their establishment.

One way to spread the word about your favorite clubhouse is to be vocal about their service. Go online and leave positive reviews explaining their efforts to make sure the club and course are accommodating.

You should also consider talking to your peers around the workplace or friends who aren't avid golfers about visiting. Generating word-of-mouth referrals is an excellent way that golf clubs get new customers and retain their business.

DINING IN

In addition to supplying a course for golfers, clubs generate income by serving drinks or offering a menu. Plan to finish up a day of playing by visiting the clubhouse and buying a round for other players or enjoying a meal. Stop by the ATM before your visit to help them avoid paying transaction fees for credit cards and have cash on hand to tip your server. Don't forget to consider visiting them even



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on days that you aren't playing golf. Many local clubhouses serve a famous dish that you won't find anywhere else in town.

RESPECT THE COURSE

You can also support your

local golf course by leaving the course in the same condition as you entered. Make sure to throw away garbage like discarded ball boxes, empty cans and snack wrappers. If they don't have trash cans available throughout the

course, bring along a bag for the litter. You must also respect the course by fixing divots you caused by a hard-landing ball, raking bunkers and repairing pitch marks.

The labor involved in main-

taining a golf course is intensive and requires many expensive machines and operators. Do your part to clean up what you can so the course workers can focus on ensuring the greens are smooth, and the fairways are welcoming.