

## The Environment of Royal Cromer Golf Club and how we plan to improve it.

Royal Cromer Golf Club has a spectacular golf course, on the cliffs lying between sea and woodlands, in a beautiful landscape famous at the time the course was formed, as 'Poppyland'. The golf course is rich in wildlife and, as part of our rolling 5-year course improvement plan, we are seeking to incorporate wildlife improvements into the non-playing areas. Bird nesting boxes (8 in the Spring of 2020) and wildflower planting (Spring 2021) are the first parts of the plan.



*The landscape of Cromer-Overstrand looked something like this 130 years ago when RCGC was formed*

Our golf course landscape was created half a million years earlier, by rocky material pushed downhill after erosion from higher land further north (Yorkshire, Scotland, Scandinavia) by ice sheets, then left here as the climate warmed and the ice melted. The soils that developed show a confusing mixture of acid sands and chalky clays, which has resulted in the already high diversity of flowers that grow in our non-playing areas.

Woodland then developed naturally over the intervening 10,000 years or so since the last ice melted. This was deciduous woodland – oak and ash with understory of elder, hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, willow and other shrubs. This type includes bracken, a species that replaced woodland as dominant plant when it was cleared by our ancestors and which, until a couple of hundred years ago, had great value to them as livestock and human bedding.



*A beautiful display of Sheeps' Sorrel, which grows on the acid sandy soils beside the 14<sup>th</sup> fairway in June-July*



*A colourful mixture of colour in a more chalky grassland area beside the 2<sup>nd</sup> tee, May-July*

Much of the higher ground around Cromer & Sheringham still retains its woodland, because poorer soils meant it was less valuable to clear it for farming. Deciduous trees have been replaced by pine plantation in many of these places because they are faster-growing, but most pines are alien to England and have little value other than as timber and a wind-break.



*A view of almost nothing but alien pines on the course from the 3<sup>rd</sup> green. Hardly a cliff-top course!*

Our course has a mixture of pines – Corsican is the commonest – but all planted in the past 50 years or so and in many places, overcrowded. The south side of our golf course boundary runs along deciduous woodland. Our bracken-covered headlands show natural recolonization by trees and shrubs, including some aliens brought to Britain by the Romans that are self-spread easily – sycamore and holm oak – as well as the rhododendron brought to UK by Victorian botanists, with some planted on the course in the last decade.



*A close up of Holm Oak – a Mediterranean evergreen*

All our golf course vegetation, but particularly on the northern side, is influenced by the weather and salt from the North Sea. That tends to keep trees wind-sculptured and maintain a gorse-dominated landscape, as we have around the back six holes.



*Gorse – a common heathland plant and a seeming magnet for golf balls at Royal Cromer*

The variety of vegetation that we do have, together with that across our boundaries, gives us a diverse animal life. Most golfers have probably seen deer (roe and muntjac) moving between clumps of shrubbery; lucky ones have also seen weasels and stoates scampering across the tees. We also have a moderately rich bird life, once you look beyond the ubiquitous magpies and pigeons! Just under 100 species of birds have been recorded over the past five years, we could almost certainly go beyond that with more members' additions to the list. One highlight among many, is that we can see five species of bird of prey in a single golf round, any time of year.

The Management Committee is now active in trying to improve the wildlife value of the non-playing areas of our course. In the Spring of 2020, we erected 8 nest boxes designed for 4 different common bird species (blue tit, great tit, robin, dunnock) in the trees around the 1<sup>st</sup> tee, 18<sup>th</sup> green and chipping area. We are now actively investigating wild flower mixes that we can seed in the area between the 1<sup>st</sup> tee and 18<sup>th</sup> green and considering other areas on the course with different mixes, as appropriate. An ecology plan was drawn up by the STRI in 2018 and incorporated into a full set of recommendations in 2019 (these can be seen by members on the Club V1 site).

We are developing plans to record more species than birds – butterflies, other insects, flowering plants, bats, with members' help. We plan to hold evening walks in the summer – watch for the monthly Greens Update from the Greens Chair.

Our list of bird species is given on the next page – can you add to it ?

**Birds of Royal Cromer Golf Course**

Alpine Swift  
 Arctic Redpoll  
 Arctic Skua  
 Barn Owl  
 Blackbird  
 Blackcap  
 Black Headed Gull  
 Blue Tit  
 Brent Goose (dark-bellied)  
 Buzzard  
 Carrion Crow  
 Chaffinch  
 Chiffchaff  
 Coal Tit  
 Collard Dove  
 Common Crane  
 Common Gull  
 Common Redpoll  
 Common Scoter  
 Common Swift  
 Common Tern  
 Common Whitethroat  
 Cuckoo  
 Curlew  
 Dunnock  
 European Bee Eater  
 Feral Pigeon  
 Fulmar  
 Goldcrest  
 Goldfinch  
 Great Cormorant  
 Great Crested Grebe  
 Great Northern Diver  
 Great Skua  
 Greater Black Backed Gull  
 Great Tit  
 Greater Spotted Woodpecker  
 Greenfinch  
 Green Woodpecker  
 Grey Heron  
 Guillemot  
 Herring Gull  
 Hobby  
 House Martin  
 Jackdaw

Jay  
 Kestrel  
 Little Tern  
 Lesser Black Backed Gull  
 Linnet  
 Long Tailed Tit  
 Mallard  
 Magpie  
 Meadow Pipit  
 Mediterranean Gull  
 Mistle Thrush  
 Mute Swan  
 Oyster Catcher  
 Peregrine Falcon  
 Pheasant  
 Pied Wagtail  
 Pink-Footed Goose  
 Red Kite  
 Red-Legged Partridge  
 Redwing  
 Redshank  
 Ring Ouzel  
 Robin  
 Rook  
 Sand Martin  
 Sandwich Tern  
 Shelduck  
 Siskin  
 Skylark  
 Song Thrush  
 Snow Bunting  
 Sparrowhawk  
 Spoonbill  
 Starling  
 Stonechat  
 Swallow  
 Teal  
 Turnstone  
 Wood pigeon  
 Wren  
 Wheatear (Northern)  
 Whimbrel  
 White Wagtail  
 Willow Warbler  
 Woodcock  
 Wryneck  
 Yellow Wagtail

**Mammals**

Mole  
 Muntjac deer  
 Roe deer  
 Grey squirrel  
 Brown rat  
 Weasel



Kestrel (Tony Brooks)



Small copper butterfly (Tony Brooks)



Muntjac deer (Tony Brooks)

92 species



Mediterranean gull (uncommon) (David Patrick)



Wryneck (uncommon) (David Patrick)