

Wilderness Country Club certified as an Audubon cooperative sanctuary

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More than 80 species of birds have been documented on the site. (Photo: Submitted)

As one of the first Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries in the Naples area, Wilderness Country Club remains committed to the long-term protection of endangered species and the local environment.

Wilderness Country Club, which features 300 low-profile condominium residences around an 18-hole Arthur Hills designed golf course, is celebrating 20 years of certification by Audubon International. The community sits on 200 forested acres on the east side of Goodlette-Frank Road, just north of Golden Gate Parkway and minutes away from Fifth Avenue South, Waterside Shops and Gulf of Mexico beaches.

Wilderness Country Club was developed with the natural environment in mind. Everything possible was done to protect as much of the existing habitat as feasible. Each condominium building was carefully sited to offer long sweeping views of golf course fairways, trees, sparkling lakes and other native plants.

Numerous specimen plants, shrubs and trees dot the property and more than 80 species of birds, including Bald Eagles, Ospreys, White Ibis, Anhingas, Great Blue Herons, Red Shouldered Hawks, Barred Owls and Swallow Tail Kites, have been documented on the site. Residents also have spotted river otters, turtles, raccoons and Big Cypress Fox Squirrels on the golf course as well as a rare bobcat siting.

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Wilderness Country Club is surrounded by other golf courses, natural county parkland and the Gordon River, making it part of a large green corridor along the river that provides a haven for birds and animals.

The lush surroundings at Wilderness Country Club provide the ideal location for the Conservancy of Southwest Florida to use as a safe place to return rehabilitated animals to their native environment. Since 2014, the community has collaborated with the Conservancy on its Upper Gordon River Wildlife Corridor project to monitor wildlife movements and conduct surveys of wildlife species in season.

Wilderness Country Club was originally certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary for Golf in 1999. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf is an award-winning education and certification program that helps golf courses protect the environment and preserve the natural heritage of the game.

The program follows a set of standard environmental management practices that are generally applicable to all golf courses. In order to be re-certified, golf course managers must show "a high degree of quality" in areas such as environmental planning, wildlife and habitat management, outreach and education, chemical use reduction and safety, water conservation and water quality management.

By helping golf course superintendents and managers enhance the valuable natural areas and wildlife habitats that golf courses provide, improve efficiency, and minimize the potentially harmful impacts of golf course operations, the program serves an important environmental role worldwide. Recertification takes place every two years and meetings are held to provide educational opportunities for members.

Wilderness Country Club is a groundbreaking residential development that holds the honor as the first private, gated golf course community with a mandatory membership built in the Naples area. The golf course community is celebrating its 45th anniversary this year.

Many of the two- and three-bedroom units have been fully refurbished for resale while others are like a blank canvas allowing purchasers to use their imagination and create a residence that suits their unique needs. Residences are spacious and feature an abundance of glass that brings the striking beauty inside.

The community's clubhouse is reminiscent of Old Florida and sits on the second highest point in Collier County. The entire property rests above a mega aquifer that transmits water for the City of Naples.

The clubhouse offers formal and informal dining for up to 200 people. There also is a full-service Golf Shop offering weekly clinics and private lessons taught by a Master Professional of the Professional Golfers Association of America along with a driving range, short-game area and putting green.

In addition to golf, members of Wilderness Country Club have access to four Har-Tru tennis courts with lessons and matches led by a U.S. Professional Tennis Association Certified Elite Professional. There also are five heated swimming pools interspersed throughout the property.

Members also may enjoy the 5-acre Frank Park that was dedicated in 2013 to the pioneering Frank family. Within the park are nearly two dozen specimen trees from all over the world, many labeled with their common and Latin names and place of origin. Other park features include four Har-Tru bocce courts, a regulation size croquet court, a dog park and herb and vegetable gardens.

Wilderness Country Club has been member owned and controlled from its inception. For additional information on this established community, call 239-261-6060 or visit online at www.wildernesscc.com

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