

Trail cameras effortlessly capture wildlife in their environments

Game cameras – sometimes called trail cameras – are wonderful tools for gathering evidence or information that might otherwise be missed.

Hunters often use them for recording animals in a particular area such as elk coming into a wallow or bears accessing bear bait.

They can also be used for research. University of Wyoming Extension educators have used cameras for monitoring animals

accessing burn regions and documenting potential predators to sage grouse nests.

Game cameras can even be used for monitoring what's getting into your trash and causing your dog to bark each night at 3.

Trail camera considerations

Trail cameras have motion-activated sensors. The camera takes a picture or video when triggered. Basic models can be

programmed to take one picture, a burst of pictures, or a video. When programmed to take one picture, even if the sensor is triggered again, the camera won't take another until a certain amount of time has passed, usually one minute. This setting can help save memory space on the SD card, which can be beneficial if the camera is not checked regularly.

One of the potential downsides of this program method is getting



a poor angle on the subject and missing out on a better image because the camera shutter is delayed.

Sometimes what triggers the camera isn't framed well, making understanding the "story" difficult. A burst of photos can tell a better story than a series of pictures that were taken every minute, but the burst uses more memory.

Grass blowing in the wind or other accidental triggers can cause many unwanted photographs to be taken, making picture review long and tedious.

A video tells the most complete story but will take up the most space on a storage card. Some game cameras can also be custom programmed to take a video and picture combination.

Pictures and videos can be taken at night and during the day. A flash is necessary for nocturnal photography, which sometimes captures the attention of animals. Animals interested in the camera (with or without the attraction of the flash) can also often create unwanted images such as close-ups of moose nostrils (but that would be fun!).

Selecting a camera

There are many brands and models of cameras. A basic model can cost less than a hundred dollars. Basic cameras store images and photos to an SD card. More advanced cameras can send images

and videos straight to one's email, but there has to be service wherever they are placed. Cameras with this capability cost \$300 to \$400.

Basic camera models can take a variety of SD card sizes but usually nothing larger than 32GB. Game cameras are also powered by batteries varying between AA, C, and D. Most cameras require six to eight AA batteries.

A camera on the one-picture setting can last a month with a 32GB card without running out of power or storage room and still have 1,000 pictures. Batteries and SD cards can be purchased for about \$10 each.

Setting up the camera

Cameras need to be mounted to something, such as a tree, post, or fence. Unfortunately, cameras are sometimes tampered with on public lands, so it's important to secure them to whatever they are mounted on and ensure they cannot be opened so batteries or SD cards are not removed. A bike lock works well in many cases.

Most cameras come with some kind of securing strap, but some durable tape is a good extra precaution. Between Wyoming wind and curious animals, making sure the cameras won't budge is important.

Camouflaging the camera in some cases may be important. For example, when recording predators on sage grouse nests, the researchers didn't want to habituate

predators to a connection between visible cameras and breakfast.

Camera orientation is also important. It's beneficial to bend down next to the camera and make sure the level of the camera is appropriate for the target images. It's also important to place the camera facing north or south so the sun doesn't overly affect images. When placing the camera, also look for blowing grass, which might trigger the motion sensor.

Reviewing images can be tedious. If there are lots of accidental images, view them as large thumbnails and only open the image if the picture seems to have changed. Remember, there could potentially be many images of blowing grass. Not opening every image to full view helps save time.

Keep an eye out for fun surprises. More often than not you'll capture images you weren't expecting. Working with game cameras can be a fun hobby and a great tool for recreational researchers; check them out!

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We're willing to bet our Brownie camera there are many opportunities to capture wildlife images in Carbon County.

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