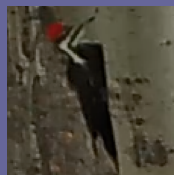


Wildlife Cameras

From the Ann & Sandy
Cross Conservation Area



A guide to Wildlife Cameras...



...is brought to you by Maha and Lucy, members of the Canadian Conservation Corps and volunteers at Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area (ASCCA), located in the foothills of AB, Canada.

In this manual we give our best advice on how to successfully set up and monitor wildlife cameras in a given area. Our knowledge is based on what we learned from the trials and challenges of managing 3 wildlife cameras during our 3-months volunteering with ASCCA.



Setting up for success:



SCOUTING THE LOCATION

Searching for signs of wildlife is the first step to determining a suitable location. In a grassland or forested area, signs may include **animal tracks/trails**, **flattened beds of grass**, **mud** on plants nearby, **tree rubs** (where cervids rub their antlers), signs of **digging**, **urination/feces**, etc. Cavities dug into rotted trees or **holes in the ground** where a beehive or grubs may have existed often indicate the presence of a *bear*. Signs of *beaver* activity include **holes in an icy pond**, piles of branches, and **teeth marks in trees**. Seasonal changes should be utilized, for example, **urine** and tracks are more visible in snow.

Secondly, **placing your camera in a wide, open space is ideal**. **Trees or fence posts** are usually best. Maha and I got great footage when we placed our camera **facing a hillside**. It created nice framing for photographs – especially when a herd of 100+ elk were hanging out in the area! We also got excellent footage from a post **facing a field**, where animals remained in view longer. It captured a fantastic sunrise – but be cautious of **sunlight obscuring images**. It's usually **wise not to face the sun**. When placing the camera along a trail, it's better to set it up **diagonally along the pathway** to get a broader view.

Choosing a spot near a **body of water** (pond, creek, natural spring) is also a good idea. Our first camera was set up along a trail to a pond, where we saw moose coming and going several times. However, **if the camera is too close to the action it may cut off parts of large mammals** – such as the elk spotted on our Creek Cam. Tree branches in the way were also an issue - but that's a discussion for the next section!



Flattened grass on a hillside = deer activity



Muddy leaves by an elk wallow = recent activity



Large, disturbed hole in ground = bear activity



Tree rubs are a sign of male cervids rubbing their antlers.



Chewed and fallen trees are evidence of a beaver dam.



A herd of 150+ elk on this hillside were captured by a camera on a tree with a wide range of view.



Lengthier videos of animal activity were recorded from a camera on a post facing this field.



A camera positioned diagonally along a trail captures more of this moose's movement.



This camera, horizontally on the pathway, caught a Coyote in the woods with its depth of perspective.

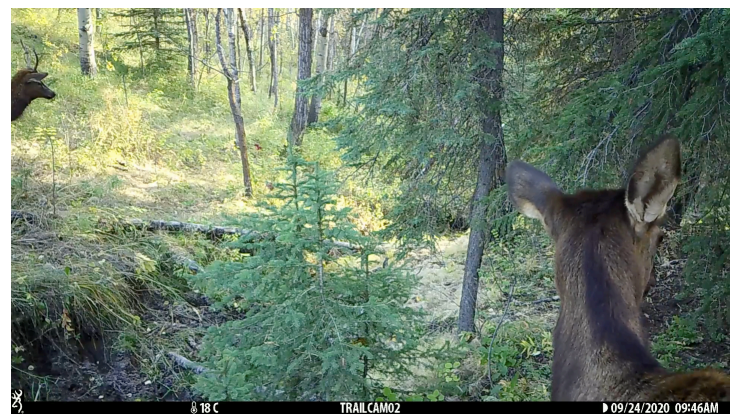
OBSTACLES TRIGGERING THE CAMERA

It's important to be on the lookout for **pieces of grass, bushes, sticks, or tree branches** which could trigger the camera with movement. Maha and I made this mistake a few times, which resulted in **excessive amounts of unnecessary footage on a windy day**. The issue was easily fixed by snapping off a loose twig or tall grasses close to the camera.

CHOOSING VIDEO OR PICTURE

We recommend setting video length to **20-30 seconds**. Longer videos are usually unnecessary and **will use up SD card storage**. However, it varies by situation. For example, we captured 3 adult moose interacting in a large, open area where it would have been beneficial to have closer to 1-2 minute video length.

Picture vs. video depends on the purpose of the footage: Is it to **identify the presence of a species, or to observe behaviour?**



This camera is too close to the trail, limiting visibility of elk. A better view could have been found from a tree further away.



Three adult moose remain in view for several minutes.

SORTING THROUGH FOOTAGE

If you're lucky, you'll be downloading and sorting through a lot of footage. How do you handle it? **Organization is key!** It's important to sort through files as they're uploaded to your computer. **Delete unnecessary footage** (shots triggered by wind) right away. If possible, **trim the excess video captured** while the camera was still recording, after animal activity exited the frame (for example, a moose walked past in the first 5 seconds, and the remaining 25 seconds is stationary). That being said, make sure to keep a few seconds of footage at the end for transitions when editing later on!

The next step is to **label and categorize everything**. Create titles for each video/photo as you sort them into folders. This will make it much easier when you're looking for certain shots later ("Where was that moose?" "I want to see that elk at nighttime.") I also recommend that you **keep the numbers on each photo/video**, so they remain in order (ex. `IMGo26_elk_nighttime`)

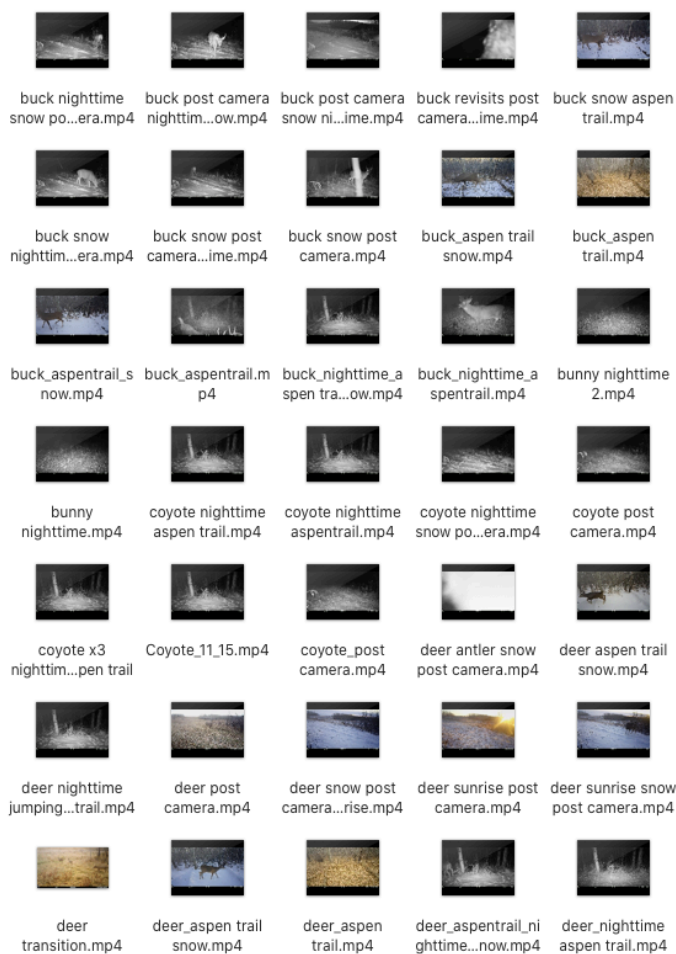
NOTE: Look out for small details! Watch the videos multiple times, **scanning carefully for signs of movement**. Before deleting, you should be able to identify what triggered the camera. Sometimes the animal is out of shot but you can still hear it running in the bushes. Here are two examples of "**camouflaged critters**" we almost overlooked:



At first, this recording was of a squirrel sitting on a dead log (righthand side). But when the squirrel jumped, it startled a small mouse that was hiding on the left.



This camera appeared to be triggered by the wind moving a thorn bush (left edge of the frame). However, a vole happened to run across the ground halfway through recording.



Footage is labelled and categorized by Species, Location, and Time of Day. It's also helpful to number them.

Best of Luck with your Wildlife Cameras!

