

BUSH HUNTING TACTICS

TRAIL CAMS

No 3 of a SERIES BY MARTIN ASKES

A box turned up at work the other month that contained several very fancy looking trail-cams called SPYPOINT cameras, complete with LED Infrared lights, sensors and lenses, all in a smart hard-shell camouflaged lockable case.

Having sold my hunting clothing business last year I'm now stepping up the magazine and testing lots of new products is part of my brief. So a few days later I was up in the Kaimai Ranges placing several of these cameras on likely looking trees, hoping for a good picture of a big stag or possum or something.

Now I've tried trail cams before, hidden cameras set up on deer trails, without much luck; so I wasn't holding my breath when a mate and I approached the first SPYPOINT camera two weeks later.

A local farmer had allowed us through his property and he said he'd seen a deer out only a few days earlier. We had set the first camera up on an open patch with plenty of grass after finding a set of marks that looked like an old red hind had passed recently. There was plenty of horse sign too as the gate was down and a couple of horses were free to wander into the bush and back to the farmland when ever they felt so inclined.

I thought we would have plenty of horse pictures as deer don't move about much in the winter at the best of times, but wow, I was very surprised! With the camera just set on the default settings we had, not only a dozen shots of deer, but one frame had five deer in it at once! Not only that, but some of the close up ones were very sharp from this IR-C model, as I was later to find out on my computer screen. The IR-C is actually an 8-mega-pixel camera and one of three different models that I was using.

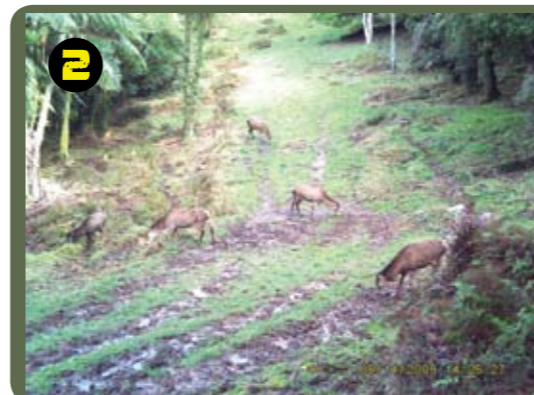
There was also some very interesting information obtained. You see, the new SPYPOINT cameras have an optional "stamp" setting that imprints the date and time onto the pictures. (Actually, the top-of-the-line Pro-X also records moon phases and temperature!) What we found out was



that there were no animals for almost a week, then after heavy rain there were several animals for several days. What we also found interesting was the times recorded that they appeared...

Now, this camera had no pictures in the entire two weeks from any animals in the mornings and right up until 2pm in the afternoon. Almost every deer, except one, was out between 2pm and 4.30pm, wandering along, feeding quite happily. This was obviously the time to be out hunting! The stags photographed, although only August, had cast their antlers; which was disappointing from a photographic point of view, but added to the information gathering aspect.

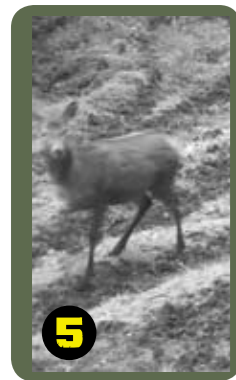
- 1 The IR-C has a 2.4" viewing screen so you can flick through your photos as soon as you get back to your camera. It's a bit like setting traps and always exciting to return to as you just never know what you have "caught".
- 2 These red deer tripped the camera from about 30 metres away with the sensitivity set on about 3/4. Note the young stag in the front has cast his antlers. The camera was set to take three frames, and then pause for a minute. Notice they are moving towards the camera but did not return the same way.



- 3 Strangely, only horses were wandering about at night. The SPYPOINT cameras switch automatically to infrared for night vision when the light levels get low and then photographs in black and white mode. The cameras do not flash and the infrared cannot be seen by the human eye.



4 The SPYPOINT cameras pick up people just as well as deer! The movement detector works just like an alarm sensor and picks up heat changes. Try and set them facing away from the sun for best results.



5 The deer in this frame was looking straight at the camera. I believe that the deer can occasionally see or hear something is there, but I can't say what it is as the cameras appear to me to be absolutely silent when taking test shots.

6 This hind with her yearling hung around for several frames. It looked like the same deer returned for several days at around the same time, travelling in the same direction.



The next camera we had set was further inside the bush and the camera was an IR-A 6.0 mega pixel model. We set this on a tight trail where there was deer sign, but, although several frames were taken, both during the day and at night, the photos were poor, capturing only part of the animal at best. The reason for this, as I was to discover later, is due to delay times between activation and picture taking. This model has a 1.9 second delay, compared to the IR-C at 1.4 and the top model, Pro-X at 1.2 seconds. That means if you point the camera across a track, usually the animal will pass the field of view and your photo will miss the animal.

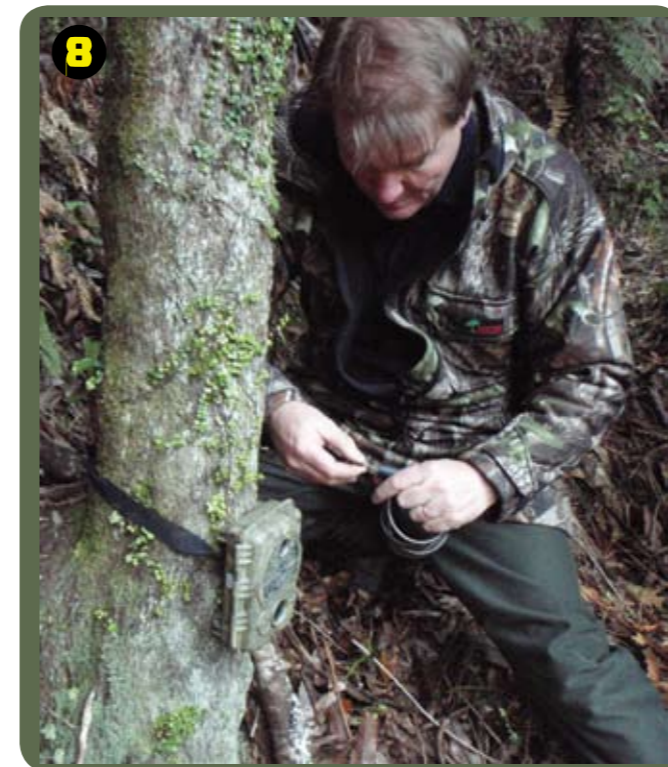
The IR-A is the cheaper model, without the viewing screen but actually had the easiest controls to adjust because they were very simply laid out. All models come with a standard removable 2GB SD card that simply slots into the side. You can just put the card into a compatible digital camera and flick through your photos on-site using your own camera should you wish. Alternatively, if you are leaving the camera in the field just replace the card with another one and slot it into your computer when you are at home to view your pics.

7 The SPYPOINT cameras all come with a standard computer



and TV jack-points and leads for viewing your pictures or video footage straight from the camera and onto your computer or TV screen.

The third camera was set up over a stag wallow, deep into the bush with very fresh stag sign. The camera was the top-of-the-line Pro-X 12.0 mega pixel model and so we set it to record in video mode. All the cameras have the video option but the pro-X records sound as well. It also has its own 3" screen to view your pictures or video footage. The Pro-X takes 6 x "AA" batteries instead of the "C" size, making the housing smaller and lighter. Plus there are rechargeable battery packs available and even plug-in solar-recharging panels available from the distributor.



8 I locked the Pro-X up with a heavy bike-type key lock that Andytek, the distributor supplied and is available as an added option. They are also looking at a screw-in bracket that will



greatly increase the security aspect just in case someone else spots your unit and decides they like the look of it.

9 Nice fresh wallow with plenty of sign. We set the Pro-X just three metres behind this well used wallow but the stag in residence stayed hidden from us and did not return.

Interestingly, there was no animal footage for almost a week, as if the scent we left may have had an effect? Then, on the second week some great footage was captured. The first was of a fallow doe. Now, with this being the Kaimai Ranges there are not supposed to be any fallow deer there. Later, the local farmer told us that there he knew of six fallow released two years ago but five were confirmed shot and one was unaccounted for. So, there it was, as plain as day, the mystery uncovered. She was actually captured on video five times! She always appeared early in the mornings, with the cool morning air seen clearly condensing from her breath. Fallow are very much creatures of habit, as those that hunt them regularly will know. If you spook one somewhere one day, just return a few days later and there is a good chance it will be very close by.

We also filmed a goat including the sound of it bleating and calling its kid, and three red hinds that came into drink from the shallow pool after the rain.

10 Fallow deer in the Kaimai ranges. The wallow has filled with water after heavy rain. I believe the rain washed our scent away as several animals were filmed after the rain but none before.



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11 Three hinds captured on video right in front of the SPYPOINT Pro-X in the Kaimai ranges, Tauranga.

12 Possums can trigger the unit at night so it pays not to have the camera set to take too many photos at once. Mind you, the SD card will take about 1000 photos on one set of 6 x "C" cell batteries. Consider the number of frames together with how long you are going to leave the camera out for.



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13 It's amazing what you can pick up with a hidden camera. This picture of a Brown Kiwi was captured on a SPYPOINT camera and sent in by the distributor just before going to print so I've included it here for your interest.



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Well, as a conclusion the pictures speak for themselves. These Canadian made trail-cams work extremely well and are very easy to use. They add a fascinating aspect to your hunting as well as being a great way to monitor an area for security reasons. Most models have an outlet for running off a 12 volt external battery should you want to leave them out for many weeks or even months at a time. I think that the sound option in the Pro-X is a fantastic feature especially for recording animals roaring and capturing the many other sounds that deer make.

I've bought a Pro-X for myself and I can't wait for the roar to set it up over the pad of a big sika stag!




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