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Snapshots from the trail

[Sam Cook](#) Duluth News Tribune Published Sunday, December 31, 2006

As a deer hunter, Steve Fiske wanted to know what kinds of bucks were cruising the woods where he hunts.

He knew all about trail cameras, the stealth units that hunters mount remotely in the woods. The cameras are triggered by the motion of a passing animal. But one of Fiske's friends had had problems with a \$300 commercial model.

"I figured there had to be a better way," said Fiske, 37, a Cloquet police officer.



The cameras are all up and working, capturing pictures of the areas where Fiske hunts. He lives on 15 acres near Cloquet, and his property is bordered by county land.

His "home-brew" cameras, as he calls them, have taken photos of beautiful bucks, inquisitive does, fawns up to their spots in a food

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So he went to the Internet, bought components and built his own trail-cam. That was September 2005.

"It's kind of an addiction," Fiske admitted. "I've got 12 of 'em now."

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plot and even a slinking timber wolf.

Fiske pursues trail-cam photography mostly out of curiosity.

“Just to see what’s out there,” he said. “Once you know what’s out there, you want to see more and more and more.”

It took Fiske three weeks to build his first trail camera out of basic components — the computer board, a digital camera, connecting cables and the case. Now he can build one in about three hours. He typically buys his digital cameras online at e-Bay.

“I can build a decent camera for about \$200,” Fiske said. “The quality, for 200 bucks, is head and shoulders above commercial cameras.”

He has had good luck using Sony P32 and P41, S40 and S600 cameras in his trail-cam applications. It’s important to have a camera that “powers up” within two or three seconds after the motion sensor has activated it, Fiske said. And a Trail-Mode chip option allows the camera to keep shooting as fast as it can cycle to get several images of the same moving animal.

His favorite trail-cam shot so far?

“Probably that little fawn,” he said. “I watched it grow up with the food plot. Of course, I’m always looking for that monster buck.”

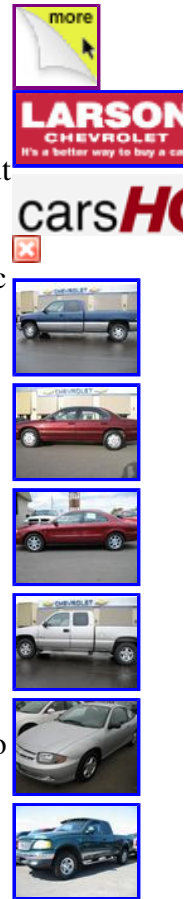
Snapshots from the trail

In a little over a year, Steve Fiske has learned a lot about trail-cam photography, using it near his home and in southeastern Iowa where he hunts deer with friends. He offers these tips for trail-cam users:

* “Height is important,” Fiske said. “A lot of people put them up too high. I put them right above my knee. You have to remember, deer are not that tall.”

* The angle of the camera toward the deer trail is important. If you put the camera at a 90-degree angle to the trail, the deer or other animal may be gone before your camera can power up and capture it. “Set it up at 45 degrees to the trail or head on,” Fiske said. “Your chances of getting a whole animal are a lot better.”

* Because some photos will be taken during daylight hours, you might want to point your camera north so the sun will be behind it for most of the day, Fiske said. He has placed cameras pointing east or west to get sunrise or sunset photos, acknowledging that shooting directly into the sun may ruin some photos, too.



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* Don't check your cameras too often. "I like to leave them in the woods for a week or two at a time," Fiske said, "so the area is undisturbed." If you check cameras too often, you'll leave too much of your scent in the woods and discourage deer from coming around.

* Fiske has tried to enhance his chances of seeing deer by planting vegetation to attract them. He uses a seed mix that includes clover, rye, rapeseed, chicory and two kinds of turnips. It grew about 2½ feet high this past summer and attracted lots of does and fawns. "Once fall came, I had 10 or 12 bucks in there in a week and a half," he said.

on the Web

Here are Web sites that Steve Fiske of Cloquet has found helpful in building his own trail cameras and learning how to use them:

* www.pixcontroller.com/

* www.whitetailsupply.com/

* realdealhuntingchat.invisionzone.com/

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