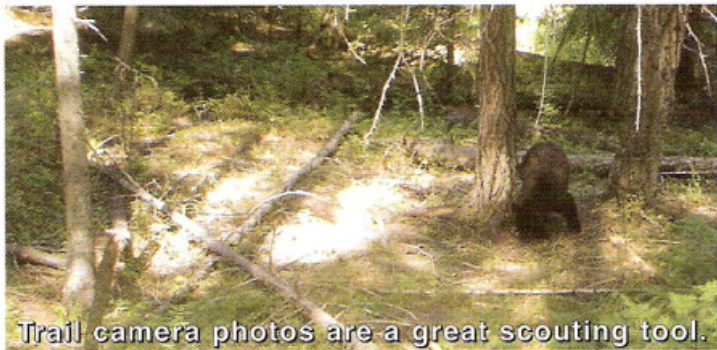


Building A Digital Trail Camera

by *Jim Gaskins*



There is no doubt that digital trail cameras are great bear scouting tools. Placed properly, you can often determine if a bear is indeed visiting a bait station or favorite berry patch, and if so, the sex, body weight and color of the bear(s). The best part is that you do not have to be there to see what is going on, and that means your absence can help keep the area free of human scent.

You can purchase a system ready to go, or build your own do-it-yourself (DIY) unit from a kit. PixController's versatile trail camera kits are priced from \$48 to \$105. The kits include everything but the camera and necessary tools. If you own a digital camera, such as an Olympus 360, or a Sony S600 or S40, you can have a professional working trail camera for under \$110. Compare this to \$300-\$400 or more for some camera systems.

There are some retail trail cameras priced under \$200, but these systems often use very low mega-pixel cameras and some will not allow you to increase the size of your memory card. Other problems include a slow shutter speed, low-quality lenses and questionable flash quality. Poor quality photos are frustrating and at the end of the day this hobby has got to be fun.

A huge plus to building your own system is that you can utilize a large mega-pixel camera and remove it from the unit at will for family uses or trophy shots in the field. I now have two Digital Eye cameras that utilize Sony's S600 camera with optional video/sound capability, which can be set to take two, three or six-mega pixel photos. I purchased two 512 MB memory cards for less than \$30 each. With the camera set on three-mega pixel and standard quality, it can record about 540 photos. The low-priced retail camera kits cannot compare. I saw one retail trail camera priced around \$150, but its camera operates at less than one mega-pixel. As you can see, the phrase "buyer beware" truly pertains when shopping for a trail camera.

I do not have a background in electronics, mechanics or construction. Nonetheless, I wanted to build my own trail camera using an older Olympus (Model D-460). I

downloaded a set of universal trail camera kit instructions from PixController, which are in PDF format and include 13 pages of step-by-step directions with accompanying color photographs. I found them easy to follow. The photographs show virtually every step, from A to Z. You will need a drill and various bits, including a one-inch counter-sink bit, wire cutters, soldering iron and solder, a sharp knife and a marking pen. I did not own a soldering iron. I discovered you could purchase a soldering iron and a roll of solder wire at for around ten bucks.

I also needed to purchase a circuit board, a power supply unit and water proof connection cables that would fit my camera. I was surprised at the small size of the circuit board, which incorporates the motion/heat detector (PIR Sensor). My Olympus camera has a telescoping zoom lens, which did not mesh with the standard case size available through the kit so I also ordered a slightly larger Pelican case from

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