

## **Sharing Trail Cam Pictures with your Hunt Group** ***(And maybe even your Neighbors or Clients)***

The trail camera is the second most valuable tool that we utilize today to monitor and manage our deer population. If you've read some of my other articles you know that our most valuable tool is keeping some basic harvest and sightings records. For those of you using trail cameras you know how exciting it is to get pictures of Bucks that are living on or visiting your property. For those of you that have Bucks that are extremely nocturnal it's always a relief to at least know that there's some Bucks on your property even though you may not see them during hunting hours. Some hunters just use the pictures to determine if they have any Bucks or Does on their property or not. Other hunters may use the pictures to determine how many different Bucks they see, approximately how old the Bucks are and even how big the antlers are. And there are hunters that use the pictures to determine what Bucks they would like to see get shot and what Bucks they would like to see given another year to grow. We fall into the previous two categories. I will go through thousands of pictures segregating the different Bucks that we have pictures of. I will ultimately end up with five to ten pictures of each Buck that gives us the camera angles we need to age the Buck on the hoof and analyze his antlers. We will study the pictures right before hunting season and determine if there are certain Bucks that we would like to protect because they are young and/or are showing great antler potential. We will even determine if there are Bucks that we would like to see get shot usually because they are an older Buck. This is where some hunt groups are going wrong today. Older Bucks with poor antlers are not being shot because the antlers aren't big enough for the hunter that sees him or maybe an antler restriction is inadvertently protecting him. Please read my articles "It's all about the Antlers" and "Antler Restrictions gone Bad" where I cover these situations.

Regardless of how you use your trail cam pictures it is good to be able to share the pictures with other members of your hunt group and possibly even your neighbors. I know that some of you are thinking that I'm crazy because you don't want anyone else to know about that big Buck you got a picture of. Well let's face it, if someone sees that big Buck they are probably going to shoot him whether they saw a picture of him or not. The flip side of this situation is that if they had seen a picture of this big Buck they just might let a younger Buck walk in hopes of seeing this bigger Buck. Or better yet if it was determined that this Buck was a younger Buck then they just might let him walk. This is exactly what we have seen happen to us. Even though many of us rely on our ability to age a Buck on the hoof to make our determination on whether we want to shoot that Buck or not these pictures will help educate our hunters and neighbors on what we all consider a Buck that would be a good Buck to shoot. In addition to that I have occasions every season where I get a good look at the antlers but not at his body so I can't estimate his age. We don't shoot if we're not sure how old the Buck is but if we recognize the antlers from our pictures then that often times helps us with our decision to shoot or not shoot.

I can't emphasize how beneficial it is to our members and neighbors to be able to look at pictures and video of Bucks from our own area. The more pictures and video you can study the better you will get at distinguishing a younger Buck from an older Buck.

Now let me review some of the various methods that you can use to share these pictures. I am certainly not covering all of the possible ways to share these pictures, just the ones that I have used myself. These methods not only apply to groups of hunters but also commercial hunting operations where they may have clients paying to hunt.

- One method is to email pictures to others. This works well unless you have lots of pictures to send in which case it can become tedious and aggravating if you don't have a high speed internet connection.
- Many people text on their phones and have become quite proficient with texting. You can certainly send a picture as well but if you have a lot of pictures to share this can also be quite tedious.
- For many years I have made a book containing a picture of every different Buck I had gotten a picture of. I would organize them in the book from the youngest to the oldest so we would all gain the perspective of how to age that Buck on the hoof. Please don't cringe at me or laugh but I continue to make this book today. Sometimes it is just easier to have the book in front of us to scan through instead of looking at a computer or phone.
- Facebook is very popular and a hunt group can certainly set up a facebook page to not only share their pictures but also communicate with each other. This is certainly a viable option for sharing your pictures and other information. The important thing to consider is do you want to limit the people that will have access to this page. One friend with access to the facebook page can suddenly give his friends access if you're not careful. I can just envision all of our pictures being made available to hundreds of facebook users.
- You might want to consider setting up a basic free website such as google sites. This requires a little more technical knowledge but if you're pretty proficient at using a computer then you can probably figure it out. This will allow you to create a login and password so that you can restrict who has access to your website.
- You can copy the pictures onto a CD, DVD or a USB drive and send a copy to each person that you want to see these pictures.
- My favorite method (at least for now) is to copy our pictures to a storage drive in the cloud. Let me interpret this into plain English. This means that I copy our pictures to a hard drive that we can access through the internet. There are various file sharing sites available. (Dropbox, Filesanywhere, Box and on and on) I am personally using onedrive since I am able to get 7GB of storage for free which is nice. I am able to create a login and password so I can give this to the people that I want to access the pictures or I can send an email with a link that will take them to the pictures. "Pretty cool stuff" like my nephew said. They can now view and study these pictures not only before they go afield but while they're in the field using a smart phone. But just like some of the other

methods you need to be careful that the login and password aren't given out to others outside of your group unless you are not concerned about others seeing your pictures.

Here is the process that I go through since I am the person going through all of the trail camera pictures. I actually go through and organize all of the pictures on my desktop computer. Initially I will just put the pictures that are worth keeping on my computer by camera location and then in no particular order after that just so everyone can see the different Bucks that we are getting pictures of. I then upload these pictures to the cloud. By me sorting through the pictures I may end up putting 50 pictures on there instead of the entire 3,000 pictures. (On a weekly basis that is!) We don't need to look at all of the Doe pictures, Fawn pictures, Bird pictures, Raccoon pictures, blurry pictures etc. We are not using the deer pictures to establish a hunting strategy so we are not analyzing the date and time of each picture. As a matter of fact remember that we are just using our cameras at feed sites to perform a camera survey and determine how many different Bucks we have pictures of. Just before the season opens I will spend some time organizing all of the pictures that I saved. I put all of the pictures of the same Buck together so we can see different angles of the antlers as well as his body. I may keep anywhere from 5 to 10 pictures of each Buck depending on the age and size of the Buck. I like setting up two folders of pictures. The first folder is young Bucks that we would like to see get some more age on them. As a group our members all agree that these Bucks should be allowed to walk. We also assure our neighbors that we are not going to shoot these Bucks so they know that if they let them walk we certainly won't be shooting them. The second folder I create is Bucks that we feel should be shot. These are usually Bucks that are 3 ½ years old with lesser antlers or Bucks that are 4 ½ years old and older. It is still the individual hunter's decision on whether they want to shoot a particular Buck or not. We are all good about letting the younger Bucks walk but sometimes we decide to pass on a Buck that was on the hit list. When I upload the final two folders of pictures to the cloud each hunter can then study the pictures (even while they're in the woods on their smart phone) and they will become more proficient at ageing and even recognizing these Bucks.

I am certainly not insinuating that if you don't use trail cameras then you aren't managing or selectively harvesting your Bucks. There are hunters that have no desire to use a trail camera. Maybe the technology intimidates them, maybe they don't have the time to review the pictures, maybe they can't afford one, maybe they like not knowing what Bucks are lurking around their property and so on and so forth. These hunters can still make the decision to shoot or not shoot a Buck at the time they see him. I strongly feel that you are going to see more and more hunters each year get more proficient at ageing a Buck on the hoof. (*At least younger versus older Bucks*) If you have not done so already please make sure you watch my video "How to age a Buck on the hoof"

In summary, if you're using trail cameras today then make sure you are organizing them and sharing them with your hunt group. If your situation allows then also share them with your neighbors so they feel like you are all sharing information. They may become willing to share their pictures with you as well. Regarding your neighbors and even co-hunters like I've said before teamwork can be more productive than competition. Someone needs to initiate this contact with the neighbors so why don't you take the initiative and invite all the neighbors to a pre-season BBQ where you can all talk through the various expectations each hunt group has. Make sure you read my article "Think Long Term

Results” where I cover some of the reasons for thinking beyond just the current season. If you have any questions regarding the above methods feel free to contact me through our website!