

Wagtail watching

HAVING A SECURITY CAMERA SET UP MEANS YOU CAN KEEP A VERY CLOSE EYE ON YOUR FEATHERED FRIENDS.
BY PAUL FURBER

Who needs National Geographic? With a security camera set up at home in the right place, you can do your own nature observations, even if they're not quite as TV-worthy as the popular nature channels. In this country we are extraordinarily spoilt if we want to see wild African animals, as the number of overseas subscriptions to wildlife cameras bears witness. But there are also some interesting subjects much closer to home. Much, much closer, in fact. By happy coincidence, I received the Axis 207 last month on review just as a pair of wagtails – those happy grey and black birds that you can find walking like an Egyptian around your lawn all year round – started building a nest in the eaves outside my office at home. The male and female had spent a week or



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two gathering nesting material from all over the garden and soon after that, started bringing food back to the nest. After some dispute over the numbers (it was a bit hard to make out what was going on), we eventually agreed that there were three chicks in the nest and growing quickly. Mom and dad were very busy indeed: every couple of minutes one of them would return with a cricket or some other morsel to be greeted by three frantic mouths.

GETTING CLOSER

Since I've installed a couple of wildlife cameras before, I thought that it would be fun to try to set up a Wagtail Cam (tm). But there was one big problem to be overcome – the Axis 207 is strictly an indoor camera. There are prominent warnings in the manual about the sensitivity of its light sensor. Putting one outside where it would be exposed to direct sunlight through the lens was not possible. So I mounted the camera inside a cardboard box, where it would be protected from any direct rays and hoped that I wouldn't void the warranty by burning out the sensor. Then, late one night, I climbed up to the roof and lashed the box to a nearby beam with some tape and connected the power cable via the supplied extension to an outlet

just inside the room through the window. It was a quick and dirty arrangement but the chicks were growing quickly and I didn't want to waste any time. There was no need for an additional network cable since the 207 is WiFi-enabled and it uses a default IP address that was detected by my network without any problems.

To my pleasant surprise, the whole arrangement worked really well. The camera survived being outside because it was in the shade from the roof and apart from a tendril of vine I had to trim away, the view of the nest was really clear. The Axis gives you a number of different options for video and audio and I tried them all.

EATS BANDWIDTH

The built-in MJPEG (a movie format based on the JPEG still image format) was by far the clearest picture but didn't support sound. MPEG had a better frame rate and supported sound but the picture wasn't quite as good as MJPEG. The camera has its own built-in web server (it is, after all, a small Linux PC with a lens) and provided a number of options for streaming video to the browser. I tried a few different browsers and all worked well.

The arrangement was great for viewing the nest from anywhere at home but would it work externally? Unfortu-

nately yes. I say unfortunately because streaming live video clobbers your bandwidth and cap in very short order. I exposed the camera's webserver through my firewall and gave it an external web address and told friends and family where to find it. A few days of multiple viewers watching the chicks test-flapping their wings and my 7Gb ADSL cap was gone. If you're going to be setting up any kind of camera and want to view it from outside, then you need lots of bandwidth. But the Wagtail Cam was certainly fun while it lasted.

All of the chicks survived and are now building their own nests not far from where they hatched. Two of them flew first time across to the main roof without any problems but the third spent a couple of days wandering around the yard before it could fly back to the nest. ☉



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