

Night vision comes of age with Bushnell's NightHawk

Night-vision devices, popularized in suspense movies like "The Silence of the Lambs" or grainy war footage on CNN, were — until recently — expensive and not optimized for general use in the outdoors.

Bushnell makes some strides toward a friendlier night-vision product with its NightHawk, a digital-camera-like device that has a stubby lens on front and a 1.5-inch LCD screen on back.

The NightHawk's singular function is the display of full-motion footage of darkened environments, and it can pick up subtle traces of light to reveal star-lit leaves or moonbeam-soaked trees. For completely dark scenes, the NightHawk casts infrared light from its integrated bulbs to provide a small window of vision into the night.

Why not just use a flashlight? Except for a subtle glow from the LCD and infrared bulbs, the NightHawk lets you see without being seen at night, a feature good for pursuits ranging from wildlife viewing to paintball.

While the NightHawk's display screen is small

and all content is seen in black and white, the footage is clear and fairly detailed. Like on a camera, the lens twists to focus precisely. I was surprised with the device's range; the infrared vision reached more than 50 feet to illuminate a darkened corner of a meadow in my tests.

It is easy to use, as there are only five operations: The screen can be brightened or dimmed, the infrared lights can be turned up or down, and the device can be turned off and on. That's it.

The NightHawk runs on a built-in rechargeable battery that provides two hours of viewing. It has a video-output port to let you hook it to a video camera for recording. A cable is included.

I had fun playing with the NightHawk in my pitch-black basement and outdoors under a sliver of moon. Sneaking through the woods using the small LCD screen as my eyes, however, was a bit difficult. Branches in the face were hard to avoid with the NightHawk's myopic view.

Practically, I could see wildlife aficionados using the product to surreptitiously view deer in the back yard or black bear tiptoeing through a campground. But a replica of those high-tech military night-vision goggles it is not. I found the NightHawk to be more of a toy than a tool. An entertain-

Bushnell NightHawk

Price: \$200

Contact: Bushnell, (888) 838-1449,
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ing toy,
none the less.

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