

## **Wainwright Dunes Wildlife Friendly Fencing**

King's College undergraduates recently completed several years of field monitoring to investigate wildlife friendly fencing on the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve. The Alberta government and the Buffalo Park Grazing Association supported this research. The students examined the benefits of wildlife friendly fencing in order to contain livestock, but reduce injuries to deer, moose, and elk attempting to cross the fences. Using a network of automated cameras on the Ecological Reserve they obtained many images of wildlife attempting fence crossings. They compared four strand

barb wire fencing to wildlife friendly fencing, using three strand fencing with a higher bottom strand and a lower top strand.

The study found that elk were the most frequent fence crossers, with seasonal and daily patterns. Elk also had more difficulty crossing fences than moose, white-tailed deer or mule deer. They concluded that, if fence crossings could be made easier, there would be significant benefits to wildlife and less fence damage for leaseholders. Any modification that increased fence permeability to ungulates, elk in particular, should result in less injury to wildlife and less damage to the fences.

They found that the safest and most preferred passage was through open gates.

There would likely be a considerable benefit if gates could be strategically located at preferred crossing points and left open when not needed to contain cattle. This practice would complement the adoption of wildlife friendly fencing throughout the reserve. The findings of this study should help wider adoption of these best practices to benefit wildlife and ranchers alike. As scientific research is one of the prime reasons for establishing Ecological Reserves it's very commendable to see the grazing association and students cooperating in such a worthwhile manner.

*- Carolyn Campbell*