

## Teresa Martin: Webcams capture much-needed world of cute

By Teresa Martin May 11, 2020



Whatever did we do before webcams?

Right now, of course, we use our built-in device cameras for all sorts of daily distanced conversation — but I'm not thinking of those. No, I'm talking about the kind of camera that shares ongoing events across the web to anyone who wants to drop by, bringing a one-to-many window on a slice of the world.

The webcam lets us take in the traffic, the surf, or — in this time of spring and Mother's Day and Father's Day — baby animals. That's right. Cute baby animals on webcams might just give cat videos a run for their money as they offer up one more diversion to our daily reality of Grim World Messages via a simple and guilt-free peek into a moment of universal interaction.

Of course webcams are hardly new. People started hooking up a camera from the earliest days of the web, but it took serious cuteness to reach critical mass. That cuteness took the form of ... wait for it! ... puppies.

Indeed, one of the first wildly popular webcams — and one that created awareness of the whole genre among the general public — arrived back in early October 2008. The Shiba Inu puppies were (sigh along me now) sooooo cute. Seriously, completely, totally, adorably cute.

And, OK, I confess that I left the feed streaming on my (ahem, work) desktop that October and November, watching adorable little fluff balls tumble, snooze, jump on mom and generally act like the very definition of cute. Media reports at time said that by mid-October some 1.2 million viewing hours disappeared into puppydom.

The puppies were not set up to “drive hits” or build audience. In the way that makes the web wonderful when it isn't corrupted by marketing motives, the couple raising the puppies wanted a way to keep an eye on the litter while they were at work. They lived in San Francisco (translation, early tech users) and a webcam offered the natural option. They used what was then a new video service, U-Stream, and they left it open for anyone to view. It gained a cultlike following, went on to stream subsequent litters of puppies, spawned lots more puppyscams, and became a fundraising engine for Shiba rescue efforts. For anyone who still needs a little Shiba cuteness and wants to see where it all began: [ustream.tv/sfshiba](http://ustream.tv/sfshiba).

Today, puppyscams as well as general webcams appear all over. A couple of good places to find reliable quality plus cuteness streaming live include Earthcam, which dates back to 1996 and focuses on geography ([earthcam.com](http://earthcam.com)), and Explore, which features nature films and, yes, live webcams ([explore.org/livecams/](http://explore.org/livecams/)).

Earthcam, self-described “virtual window on the world,” brings access to locations around the globe that “may be difficult or impossible to experience in person.” Great place for mountaintops and beaches and all the places we can't go to right now. And, it also streams

cute. In honor of spring and babies and mothers and fathers check out:

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- Baby falcons at GM in Warren, Michigan. Yes, it seems these birds enjoy a bit of urban nesting and fledging: [earthcam.com/usa/michigan/warren/falcon/?cam=falcon\\_mi](http://earthcam.com/usa/michigan/warren/falcon/?cam=falcon_mi).

- Cheetah cub cam at the National Zoo. In addition to baby cheetahs, the National Zoo offers multiple other critter cams along with a variety of ideas for using the cams for at-home learning, so you and own cubs can binge on cuteness and justify it all as education: [nationalzoo.si.edu/webcams/cheetah-cub-cam](http://nationalzoo.si.edu/webcams/cheetah-cub-cam).

- Osprey nest, in Massachusetts from the Oxford Conservation Department, featuring some very dedicated avian parents: [earthcam.com/usa/massachusetts/oxford/?cam=oxford\\_osprey](http://earthcam.com/usa/massachusetts/oxford/?cam=oxford_osprey).

And, to visit ospreys a little closer, take a click by the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History to follow the annual hatching of the osprey eggs, in this webcam hosted directly by the museum itself: [ccmnh.org/Osprey-Live-Stream](http://ccmnh.org/Osprey-Live-Stream).

At Explore's live streams, what could be better for puppy season than watching young pups learn to become service dogs for veterans? You can watch their growth and socialization at Dog-Bless-You: <https://explore.org/livecams/dog-bless-you/service-puppy-cam>

Of course, you could also virtually visit the Great Dane puppy room at the Service Dog Project in Ipswich: [explore.org/livecams/service-dog-project/great-danes-indoor-room-puppy-cam-2](http://explore.org/livecams/service-dog-project/great-danes-indoor-room-puppy-cam-2).

To go small, watch tiny hummingbirds rear their tinier chicks: [explore.org/livecams/hummingbirds/bella-hummingbird-nest](http://explore.org/livecams/hummingbirds/bella-hummingbird-nest).

And let me just say this: young pandas and their parents! I have let this run for an embarrassing amount of time because I apparently can't get enough of snuggling panda bears in this irresistible feed from the Shenshuping Gengda Panda Center, Wolong Valley Nature Reserve, Sichuan, China: [explore.org/livecams/three-bears/wolong-grove-panda-yard](http://explore.org/livecams/three-bears/wolong-grove-panda-yard).

Webcams bring us back something we started to lose as we moved to the digitally enabled one-to-one communication model so trumpeted in the 21st century: shared moments. As we watch the same livestream, we each experience the tiny hummingbirds getting breakfast from their hummingbird parent or the roly-poly puppy stretching and yawning. We experience it in our own way, in our own place — but we also share that experience with thousands of others.

We might be alone, but through a one-to-many low-key no-FX view, we come together sharing a story of cute. I don't know about you, but that's a story that really resonates this week.

Teresa Martin lives, breathes and writes about the intersection of technology, business and humanity. Read more of her recent columns at [www.capecodtimes.com/teresamartin](http://www.capecodtimes.com/teresamartin).