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# Bird-hides and Boardwalks

by

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# *INTRODUCTION*

The principle of the use of hides goes back into antiquity, the success of the hunter is largely proportional to his ability to see and not be seen. Early people throughout the world used shrubbery to hide behind while hunting, or concealed themselves behind a floating raft or branch of vegetation as they moved through the water. Today, bird-watchers, field naturalists and photographers have largely taken the place of the hunter in our modern society, so that the thrill of the hunt can still be enjoyed. Field observers still enjoy sighting a new species or adding another mammal or bird to their life list, and photographers still strive to get that unique action shot of the unusual in nature. Like the early hunter, success is greatly dependent on not disturbing the subject being observed, so watchers will do everything possible to remain inconspicuous. This includes not wearing brightly coloured clothing, moving quietly, keeping voices low, and avoiding betraying reflections from camera or binocular lenses.

However, these strategies are not always enough. Some birds and animals have heightened sensitivity to human presence in their territory and they may consequently become alarmed and flee the area. One way to get closer to the naturalist's subject matter is to make use of a hide or blind, a structure which hopefully will allow the observer to see and not be seen. Hides are an important means to enable observation of wildlife at closer quarters than would otherwise be possible.

The amount which has been written on these subjects is fairly minimal, except for a number of excellent books on photography which deal with the special needs of photographers. This book is concerned with the design, construction and use of concealed or concealing structures which are so located as to provide a view of a bird or animal territory with the purpose of observing the behaviour of the bird or animal without detection. It will deal with permanent buildings of many forms of construction, portable structures, mobile means of concealment, underground hides and hides up in the air. Other structures commonly used for wildlife observation are also given some consideration. Elevated viewing towers or platforms may incorporate hides, but in some cases distance will be sufficient to avoid disturbing the birds or animals being observed. Boardwalks are often extensions of hides or means of access to hides, frequently constructed on flat areas which may be subject to tidal or other flooding events. They allow access to observation points with the minimum of difficulty and environmental damage, and may also provide some degree of concealment. Some boardwalks are observation decks in their own right, providing the observer with otherwise inaccessible views. They frequently lead through mangroves or rain-forest, over wetlands or tidal inlets or provide access over other difficult terrain.

It is suggested that persons or groups contemplating provision of bird-hides, viewing platforms or boardwalks should inspect as many existing structures as is practicable.

## Some Legal and Social Considerations

Both State and Commonwealth Government Building Regulations and Local Government approvals need to be complied with if any person or group wishes to erect a hide or blind of a permanent nature. Adjacent toilets and car parks may need to be provided. Municipal offices can provide guidance. These restrictions do not apply to portable or mobile hides, of course.

Conservation-minded groups or service clubs may decide to construct structures such as bird-hides, boardwalks and/or observation towers to benefit the community. For the protection of such groups, it is strongly recommended that one of the first things to be done is to obtain permission in writing from the owner or management of the property where the construction is proposed. Any person or group operating a hide or similar construction as referred to in this book, or using such equipment for its members, should ensure that adequate Public Risk Insurance has been taken out to cover such use. In particular, it is important to be aware of the maximum number of persons the structure is designed to hold at any one time and to see that this number is not exceeded.

Some park authorities do not allow dogs or other pets within the park. In some instances firearms are prohibited, but in other wetlands there is a stipulated time (for example, duck season) when guns are allowed and may be used to shoot game in prescribed areas. Regulations pertaining to such matters should be exhibited clearly at entrance points.