

Field Test

Stealth Gear One Man Chair Hide M2

There's nothing wrong with sitting on the job. In fact, as **Kaleel Zibe** discovers, sometimes it is preferable, as he tries out this portable chair hide

Price: €126.90 inc. Dutch VAT & delivery from Stealth Gear's own shop. **UK online price** (other outlets): £95-110 incl. VAT & delivery

Stealth Gear is a Dutch-based producer of hides and outdoor clothing suitable for wildlife photographers. The chair hide is cleverly designed so one person can sit in the chair and pull the hide material over them. It is portable enough to carry round, comfortable to use, and fits into relatively small spaces. The whole thing pops up and packs away quickly and is made from durable, camouflaged, weather resistant materials that blend in well with the surroundings. It can be used short term, or left in place for long stints. Tent pegs, guy ropes and carry bag are included.

I bought the chair hide as a smaller alternative to my large dome hide, which takes more time to set up. Its size and portability makes it more likely to be used where a larger hide wouldn't, particularly in confined spaces. When packed, it can be kept in the boot of a car, which is where mine lives when not in use.

When I first unpacked the hide bag, I was pleasantly surprised that the bag itself has straps, meaning it can be carried on your back. Even while carrying camera gear, the hide bag can be slung over one shoulder.

The hide is erected in seconds,



Hide and seek. The Stealth Gear Chair Hide can be set up quickly just about anywhere

simply by pulling the hoop arrangement over the chair: it's a beautifully simple and effective design, but also feels robust enough to repeat again and again. The guy ropes and pegs can be used to secure the structure against wind. Once the hide is up, you can raise the hoop to place tripod and camera gear inside before sitting in the chair and pulling the 'lid' over yourself. Simple.

Putting it to use

I found the hide roomy enough to sit in, even with a big lens, tripod and other gear. It might look like a camouflaged Dalek when ready to go, but it will hide you from the wildlife and keep the elements off.

The hide plainly works: shy wildlife such as the jay came within a few metres to be

photographed. Zips allow you to adjust how much of the front-flap opens, from a wide aperture for good visibility, to a more closed up and hidden viewpoint. I normally go for somewhere between the two and use a piece of green scrim net to cover the remaining space (see above). Any greenery available nearby can be draped over to help the hide blend further into the surroundings.

One thing I find frustrating when using hides is that I can't easily see or hear what's going on around me. I like to be able to survey the wider area, rather than just looking forwards all the time. However, the three side windows provide excellent flexibility because you can tailor the view of each. The windows have adjustable scrim netting

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A nuthatch gets the prize
Nikon D4 with Nikkor 600mm f/4 lens, ISO 7200, 1/800sec at f/11

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to allow some light and visibility, while still remaining hidden. In use, the metal and fabric chair and camouflage material proved durable and I expect to have many years' service out of the hide yet. Having left it in situ for months, it performed perfectly during high winds and torrential rain.

Creature comforts

Thoughtful features such as a cup-holder, comfy chair and highly adjustable windows and openings help make the chair hide a very usable piece of equipment at a very affordable price. In comparison to the larger dome hide, it is more comfortable, lighter and more flexible.

Consequently, the hide I use most often now is the chair hide.

If I were to be picky, I'd suggest a few small modifications: the front flap could be slightly lower to match the shooting position from the chair; an extra built-in front



scrim would provide even more flexibility when the front is fully open; toggle fastenings, rather than noisy Velcro, on the side windows would allow silent adjustment. When using a 600mm lens on a tripod, the legs occasionally showed just underneath the hide. A little more fabric would help to avoid the problem. But really, I love this hide and it has served me well as it is.

<http://www.stealth-gearshop.com>

Using the chair hide did not disturb shy birds like this jay

Nikon D4 with Nikkor 600mm f/4 lens, ISO 1800, 1/800sec at f/4



My rating

Features

9/10

A one-person metal and fabric chair inside a hide made out of durable, weather resistant camouflage material. Pegs, guys and bag included.

Build quality

9/10

The hide material is tough and weather resistant and the whole thing, including the chair, feels robust enough to last for many years of service.

Design & Performance

9/10

Clever design means easy, flexible setup in the field with minimal fuss. I didn't experience any rain leaks and the camouflage pattern works well.

Handling & Practicality

8/10

Easy and fast to erect. Lighter and more portable than most hides. Comfortable shooting position. Really, minor gripes aside, this is a superbly useful hide.

Value for money

10/10

For the price, the performance is fantastic. Well worth the money. I'm considering buying another.

Overall 45/50

An essential piece of kit for anyone serious about photographing shy wildlife. Well designed, robust, flexible, cost-effective and with a good balance between portability and size. Works as well on day shoots as it does when left for long periods of time.

The perfect stop-gap between camouflage clothing and larger hides.

