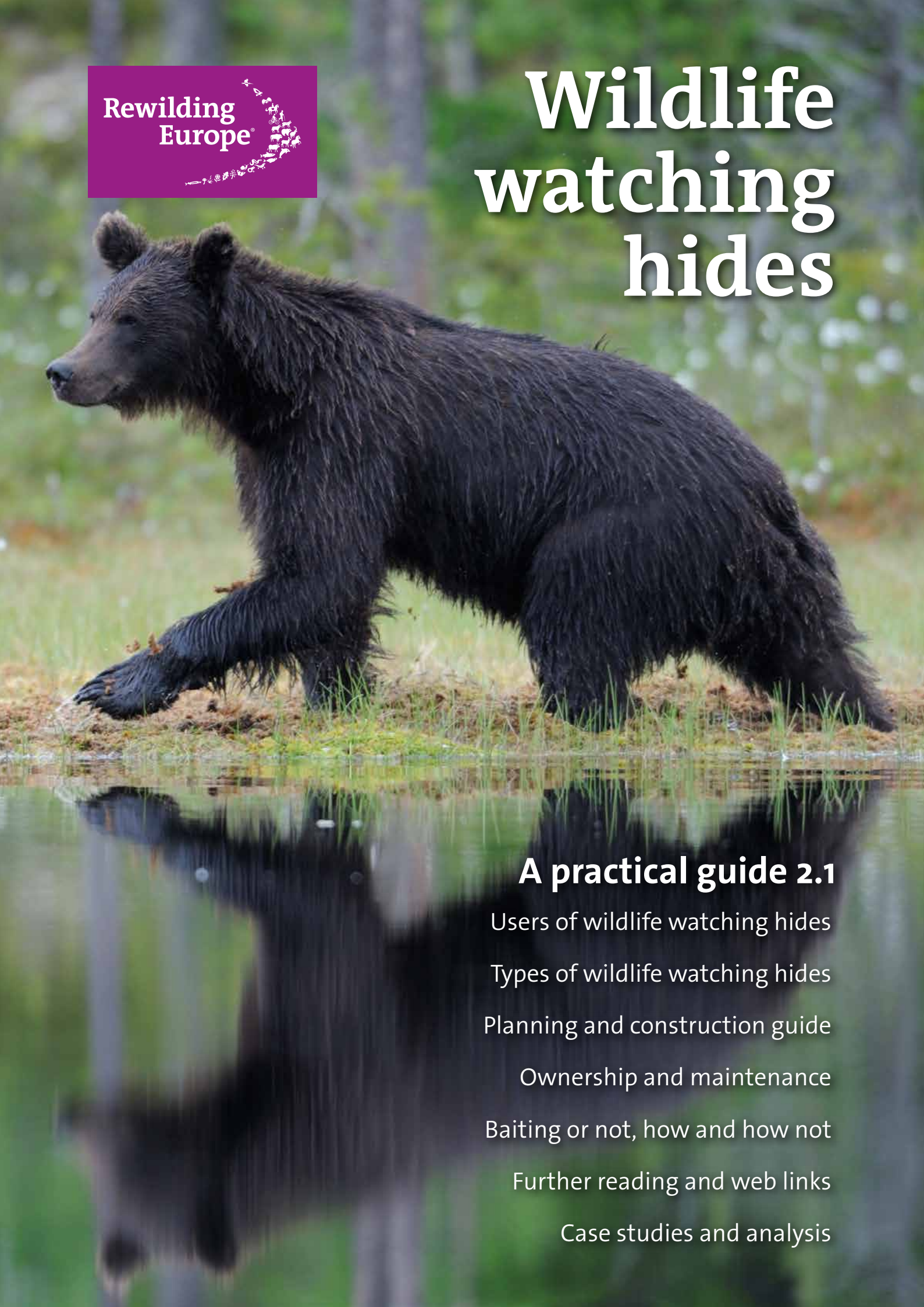

Rewilding Europe®

Wildlife watching hides

A practical guide 2.1

Users of wildlife watching hides

Types of wildlife watching hides

Planning and construction guide

Ownership and maintenance

Baiting or not, how and how not

Further reading and web links

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1. Introduction

Wildlife watching tourism is a priority enterprise activity within Rewilding Europe and can take many different shapes and forms. In Europe, due to the relative shyness and low population densities of many animal species, one of the most obvious methods to help visitors to have up-close experiences of wildlife is to use wildlife watching hides that make safe and close encounters possible.

Wildlife hides on their own will not generate many rewilding benefits. However, if they are part of a well thought-out business plan, or a product used by several different companies together, they can be extremely useful. Imaginative, well-designed and practically useful wildlife watching hides can help bring not only significant business for local entrepreneurs, but also finance for rewilding efforts and many new ways to engage a wide variety of local stakeholders.

Wildlife watching hides (also known as 'blinds' in America) have the following advantages:

a. **Undisturbed wildlife** – Hides allow wildlife to be viewed without being disrupted, harassed or unnecessarily disturbed;

b. **Visitor access** – Visitors can view wildlife up close. A good hide also makes that viewing more accessible and comfortable, encouraging and attracting a wider range of people to wilderness and wildlife areas. First-hand experience of seeing wild animals in real life also supports conservation efforts as the fear for certain large carnivores usually diminishes once people have been able to see these animals with their own eyes, at close distance, from a safe viewing cabin;

c. **Protection and comfort** – A hide offers good comfort and protection for viewers against adverse weather, like low temperatures, rain, wind, snow or direct sunlight. It also provides a certain feeling of safety whilst watching larger species such as bears or wolves;

d. **Visitor management** – Placing hides in specific locations can allow conservation area managers to control, limit and canalise visitor access as well as wildlife movement;

e. **Commercial revenue** – A good hide is a nature based service asset that visitors cannot easily bring along, or are not permitted to do/build on their own. This makes the hide concept an attractive means of generating revenue by providing extra, privileged, paid-for access to attractive nature. Spending time in a professional wildlife watching hide is not

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something the tax-payer can expect the state to provide. It is a friendly business offer, where a very special service is provided to a customer willing to pay for it. It is one of the best ways to create local income from wildlife resources, both for local entrepreneurs and landowners, which in turn is one of the best ways to solve man-and-wildlife conflict.

Key points to consider when planning to invest in and build one or more hides are:

a. **User profile** – Establish what type of user/target group the hide should be designed for. Mass-market tourists, small guided groups, and professional photographers all have somewhat different needs, expectations and functionality requirements. Hides should always be designed with the specific types of users in mind, to ensure they make the clients happy, operate effectively and with the least impact on the environment;

b. **Functionality** – What are the functionality requirements for these specific users? The most successful hides are not always very expensive, lavish or elegant. Simple, well planned, low profile hides that do the job well for the customer and that blend into their environment are generally the most effective. If hides are also attractive-looking, that is definitely an added advantage;

c. **Sensitivity to the environment** – What is the aesthetic and physical impact of the hide on the natural environment? For several reasons, we generally recommend that the hide should be able to be moved so that the area can be restored. Many wildlife species tend to influence the terrain and vegetation in front of a hide, and the professional operator of the hide will want their visitors to have a fresh, pristine and natural feeling from the environment in view from the hide. This also attracts returning customer, since they will have a new backdrop for their wildlife photographs the next time. This mobility has great influence on the choice of technical construction for the hide;

d. **Management and finance** – Who is going to operate and maintain the hide – has a business plan been made to confirm that it is commercially sustainable, who will have the rights to use the hide, and when? Most important is to be clear about who will be the entrepreneur behind the operation? Just building hides without having the operating entrepreneur very involved at the start of the planning process usually results in problems and failure further down the line, as the design and operating plan might not fit the eventual target group;

e. **Approval** – Have all relevant permissions to install the hide in a certain location, especially from the land owner/manager and the relevant authorities been secured?

Successfully designed, operated and managed hides create a wonderful experience for visitors and attract them to nature by making it more accessible. Poorly styled and operated hides can however ruin a wilderness experience for the user and also cause lasting damage to the integrity of the natural landscape.

2. Users of wildlife watching hides

It is important to establish the type of user or target group to design a specific hide for. This will determine the design, functionality, management and eventual commercial performance of the hide. Generally users can be classed into four categories:

General public

Some "hides" are freely open to visitors of public nature conservation areas. These hides are generally large structures aimed at accommodating 10–20 or more people at a time. They are often very costly and mostly financed by public funding. Typically they offer limited quality wildlife viewing; are often located too far from the wildlife and are not suitable for photographers (often poorly situated in relation to vegetation backgrounds and the sun, have the wrong opening hours and are frequently poorly operated and maintained). Users will typically stay in such a hide for not much longer than 10–30 minutes depending on the wildlife viewing and will rarely pay for a visit to such a hide. We generally discourage such hides to be built as they often create a poor experience and they also risk seriously damaging business opportunities for more professional wildlife watching tourism operations in that area.

Nature lovers

Nature lovers are typically day or overnight visitors who enjoy exploring natural areas and have limited requirements beyond experiencing nature. These users will typically use the facility for a number of hours. They are prepared to pay extra for high probabilities of seeing wildlife. Virtually all nature lovers also take pictures with their cameras/ mobile phones. Hides servicing these groups are generally designed for 5-12 people either in one hide or split between two at a single location. Such hides are generally slightly more comfortable than dedicated photographer-specific hides and often include toilet facilities and a somewhat higher design specification. The emphasis here is more on viewing than photographing so observation is key. This means that the view from these hides needs to be good and the hide comfortable to be in. In these hides it is generally good to use the big, see-through windows of **"Shoot-through-the-glass"**. This glass should always be of the brand and type detailed below, or else it can render itself useless for all photographers.

Hide designs for this user group can typically be combined with those for nature photography enthusiasts, provided that if mirror glass is used, the quality of glass is the right one and can be photographed through (see technical details below).

Nature photography enthusiasts

Hides designed for 1–5 people who are serious photography enthusiasts. These users have some added specific requirements: the landscape background, the position of the sun in the morning and evening, as well as the hide generally being at ground level and not a tower or on a high platform, unless the attraction sits at that level.

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Visibility and the possibility to take photographs preferably across three sides are other preferred features here, sometimes also added with an observation window through the back wall of the hide.

Two main types of hides can be distinguished here:

- **"Shoot-through-the-glass"** hides feature large mirror glass windows (c 400-500 mm high with top quality glass panes from specialist producers (noted below), and stretching almost the full length of the hide). The photographers can then shoot straight through the glass without losing any sharpness quality of the image. The basic versions of these hides are typically very simple, with just a window (that can be tilted a bit inwards, to reflect the sky rather than the wildlife seeing themselves), benches or beds, and black curtains inside, for when the sun shines straight in through the glass.
- **The classic, "Separate viewing windows and camera lens port holes"** kind of hides instead feature a row of port holes or 'gun ports' for the camera lenses through the front and side walls (typically two ports per photographer) that are lined with funnels of cloth that can be strapped around the lens. These hides also typically have a low, panoramic double-glassed window running across the hide at eye-level when the photographer/visitor is sitting, above the 'gun port' shooting holes. These hides often have a bench wide enough to support ball-head or gimbal camera mounts – see technical specifications for bench dimensions.

These hides typically cater for 1–5 persons with a simple design and basic level of comfort as the clients may spend full days and nights and sometimes even several days in the hide. Insulation against heat and cold, beds that fold down from the back wall, heater possibilities and an added outhouse/toilet section connected at the rear of the cabin are also common features for these hides.

For protection when the hide is not being used, wooden shutters that cover the openings and/or windows are often installed and very useful. When raised, these shutters also protect the window and camera lenses from direct rain and snow fall.

Users of these hides are willing to pay a premium price for the hide experience if there is a very good chance of wildlife appearing outside the hide. The price of the hides is directly connected to how often wildlife is seen from the hides and at what times of day. Typically clients should be able to see the main wildlife species on at least 80% of visits for a successful hide.

Rewilding Europe strongly recommends hide operators to target nature lovers and nature photography enthusiasts within all rewilding areas. We support wildlife watching businesses that target both these groups where possible.

High-end tourists

These are visitors that are looking for a more 'stylish' experience. Hides for this target group need more detailed design specifications, always including a toilet and superior levels of comfort, interior design, luxury and romanticism. Functionality to cater for overnight guests with luxurious furnishings and features, for example a reindeer rug, food and drink hamper with local produce and/or an indoor fire-proofed wood burner. This type of hide or cabin requires a more qualified operator with access to the high-end tourist markets. Such a hide should be located in a more secluded site with potential to be serviced (i.e. food and drink provided in a careful and imaginative way so as to not disturb wildlife). These hides are primarily for driving revenue in destinations accessible to high-end tourists.

Where the market potential allows, and where there also is a suitable operating partner Rewilding Europe is also interested in supporting the development of these kinds of hides.

3. Types of wildlife watching hides

Wildlife watching hides come in a wide range of materials, styles and techniques to offer different functionality capabilities. Hides must always be sensitive to the local environment and culture. Where possible local natural materials and styles should be used in hide construction. Existing traditional buildings can also be used to develop hides (For example hide 2.6). It is vitally important when selecting a hide design to establish what type of hide will best suit the user, the wildlife and the environment. These are the two general types of hides available:

Tent hides

Tent hides often provide great wildlife viewing experiences. They are easy to carry, set up and take down. They come at a very low cost and have very little impact on the environment.

Advantages

- Lower physical footprint and impact on the immediate nature/wilderness;
- Maximum flexibility and mobility;
- Lightweight;
- Useful for viewing unpredictable wildlife that doesn't always stay in a single spot, for example Capercaillie leks;
- Low cost.

Disadvantages

- Offers limited protection from rain / snow / wind/ low and high temperatures;
- Low comfort level, with no integrated services;
- Whereas wildlife after a while gets used to a permanent hide, a tent hide is often seen as something 'new' in the terrain, and therefore a bit suspicious/disturbing, especially by the more intelligent and shy species;
- Because of these reasons, it is often more difficult to charge premium price for tent hide products.

Examples

A good version of a pop-up tent hide is the **'Ameristep Dog House'** (http://www.ameristep.com/blinds/doghouse.html). It is an 'industry standard' tent, mainly catering for photo enthusiasts, bird watchers and hunters. It costs approximately €130 and can be erected in three minutes, weighs 4 kilos and comes in a little backpack with no tented bottom. It has capacity for 2 photographers side by side with sufficient room for people to sleep in close quarters either in sleeping bags or on a small inflatable mattress. There are also many other tent hide brands and products.

Professional photographers are likely to have their own tent hides, so we advise hide operators to mainly focus on cabin hides in order to maximise

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their income opportunities, and only use tent hides as backup or for special purposes/occasions. For example if access to a site is restricted and photographers are not allowed to use their own tent hides but an operator has **secured special permission / permits** to manage a tented hide.

Permanent hides

Permanent hides are built in many different models, materials and designs, with varying levels of quality, comfort and cost. From advanced structures dug into the ground or even sunk into a lake, to architect-designed hides, and very straightforward plywood structures. Hide design depends on the area, the user target group, target species, climate, cost and income capacity.

Permanent hides are either completely non-movable, or built to be mobile and moved if necessary. These hides may be moved using a variety of means for example car, horse, snowmobile, ATV, forest tractor etc. Some are even built on broad runners or skis, to be pulled through boggy or snow-covered terrain. Others can be easily disassembled to be moved in sections. Generally, we recommend entrepreneurs design hides that are somehow moveable unless they are intended for very special features, for example dug into the ground.

Advantages

- Higher level of comfort;
- Visitors can stay in the hide for longer periods;
- Commands a higher price for use;
- If constructed the right way can be moveable/ mobile.

Disadvantages

- More complicated to design and construct;
- More expensive than a tented hide;
- More costly to operate and maintain;
- Sometimes they can be a visual disturbance on the landscape.

Examples

See section 7.

Floating hides

The idea here is to get down low and close to water fauna – water birds, beavers, otters, seals and the like. This type of innovative hide is very appreciated by water bird enthusiasts who cannot get these views of wildlife without a floating hide. This product represents a typically true added value service and is very uncommon in Europe. Two main styles can be identified: the one-person, **"swimming hide"** (in which the photographer/visitor is in a wetsuit or even better a dry suit in the water, and can move around with the hide by using fins, electric motors or by walking on the bottom), and the **"pontoon hide"** (which is a bigger, multi-person setup, typically built on a pontoon or float bridge structure, with a purpose-built cabin on top with shooting windows/ openings as close to the waterline as possible). The colder the water and the more marine the conditions or wintery the season, the better it is to consider the pontoon hide. It also results in better work time/ income ratio for the operator. The pontoon can easily be towed by a boat and anchored temporarily or semi-permanently in a certain location. Attracting the fauna could be done in various ways, especially by providing some food matter. **The pontoon hide is definitely recommended for tourism operators in wetland/lake/coast/river areas.**

4. Planning and construction guide

The following is a planning and construction guide for wildlife watching hides that aims to help a wildlife watching entrepreneur / operator to maximise the visitor experience, attract the right kind of customers to their operation and avoid costly mistakes, both financially and for the natural areas in which they are located.

Location of the hide

Location and positioning of a hide is fundamental to its effectiveness for viewing and photographing wildlife. The following considerations should be taken into account when selecting a suitable hide location.

Orientation

Hides should be orientated in the most suitable possible direction to benefit the user and enhance the experience offered. Things to think about include:

- **Where is the sunlight coming from** at the times of day when wildlife is most likely to visit the hide location (typically sunrise and sunset). The angle of the sunrise or sunset in key seasons should be carefully considered for the purposes of photography. If and where the shadow falls earliest should also be thought of. In Europe, hides often face northward, giving opportunities for side light in early mornings and late evenings. Facing westward is also an alternative, where you get fully lit motifs in the morning and backlit motifs in the evening. Photographers and wildlife enthusiasts will prefer dawn and sunset light, more general tourists will often prefer just the sunset;
- **Hides can be located** within existing features of the landscape, for example camouflaged into bushes or trees, stonewalls, hedges, in depressions in the ground, integrated into historical buildings, or rock features.
- **Background view** – a backdrop that is not the sky is preferred, like perhaps a forest / hill / mountain to provide a clean backdrop and not a broken horizon across the image. There should not be any man made structures such as power lines, houses, fences, roads, or railways in the view.
- **Foreground/scene setting** – a clean foreground and scene setting is essential with no garbage, visible feeders or other man-made objects, and no disturbing bushes or trees that obscure the view from the hide. If raptors are the subject and if there is no good tree for them to use for perching, it is a good idea to bring in and mount a good looking natural tree trunk/ branch somewhere in front, at the proper distance (but not with branches visibly cut by saw). Views from a hide should always be **natural** and **aesthetically good looking**.

Wildlife

Ensure the hide is positioned in a place where the chances of viewing wildlife are highest. Knowledge of the most heavily used game trails is key, and the availability of water/ponds/springs are also crucial factors in hotter and drier areas. These factors adapt for different species through the year. Keep

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in mind when the main visitor period is planned to be. Hides could preferably be moveable to adjust for wildlife movements and prevent unnecessary damage to the landscape especially in wilder areas.

User profiling

Identify the target user group / market that the hide will service. It is essential to understand the type of visitors the hide is being designed for:

- **General public;**
- **Nature lovers;**
- **Nature photography enthusiasts;**
- **High-end tourists.**

Exterior design

Always select the hide type that does the job for the client with the least impact on your budget, the environment and wildlife. Permanent hides should be built preferably using sustainably sourced local materials and in local construction styles where possible.

*See the **Annex at the end of this folder**, for some design specifications and technical drawings of a standard hide, with measures that are proven effective from a user perspective. These can of course all be adapted to fit into the local landscape, especially through choice of wall, roof material and location.*

Hide users are generally very sensitive to maintaining the wild integrity of the landscapes in which the hides are situated. They don't want the hide itself to ruin the wild feeling of the landscape.

- Given it is better to design a semi mobile / non-permanent hide it is important to consider the foundations very carefully. **We strongly recommend that hides are not built on a concrete slab or foundation and especially not if it is going to be situated in a core wilderness area.** Concrete slabs easily send the wrong message, as they do not feel like true nature. If there is definitely a requirement for some permanent foundations (underwater hides, dug down hides and drinking stations for example) these have to be designed very creatively and sensitively so as to avoid negative visual or environmental impact, and rather be placed in buffer areas and not in core wilderness areas.

- Mounting the hide on the ground could be done in a number of ways, depending on what the ground is like – on logs or on beams, or with metal poles stuck into the ground. On broad skis or runners is also possible. In bogs are often used long beams reaching far outside the size of the hide, some times with planks underneath.

- Camouflage is not an ideal material to put on the outside of a hide partly because it looks very military and can give incorrect connotations about the hide. Traditional materials most often look better and more organic.

Interior design

The interior design of the hide will depend on the type of hide, user, and purpose:

- Chairs or benches to accommodate the hide users are important and must be included with photographers in mind. They will be sitting for long periods of time so they must be very comfortable, for example rotating office chairs with armrests and if a bench is used something soft for the client to sit on like well-filled cushions covered in canvas;
- **"Separate viewing window and camera lens port hole hide"** – here a sturdy support bench is needed along the interior front side and under the camera lens port holes in order to be able to fix the camera mounts/ball heads in holes in the bench. This support bench plank needs to be at least 250–300 mm deep and 40–50 mm thick, going from wall to wall with support legs at an angle, either all the way down to the floor, or to a 45-degree position on the wall, preferably connected to the main vertical roof support posts. This bench then should have a set of holes drilled in it (preferably in a "cross-shaped" form, so that the ball head can be moved back/forth and left/right) in front of every camera position/hole, thereby allowing for all kinds of ball heads and camera supports to be screwed onto it.
- Bolt screws need to be supplied, with standard ball head thread of 3/8" inch and about 100–80 mm long, preferably made in INOX or stainless steel. These should be supplied in the hide, together with a set of metal spacers and spacers made of wet room plywood of varying thickness, each with a hole in it, so that it fits for attaching many different kinds of ball heads. These bolts need wing nuts on top, or wings welded onto them, for easier handling.
- Some hides have a heavy, thick and round steel plate for each lens port hole, maybe 250 mm in diameter, that is felt covered underneath and with a ball head screw in the middle. That makes it possible to slide around the camera gear on the bench, still perfectly stable. The round plate together with a beanbag. That is a rock solid support.
- Situated above the camera lens port holes, there then has to be a low, panoramic viewing window, with double-glass mirror glass (as to avoid condensation/fogging), at the comfortable eye-view level for an average sized user.
- **"Shoot-through-the-glass"** technical solution, you don't need an interior bench at all and the visitor can use their tripods instead. The mirror glass hide gives by far the best general view/visitor experience and it is also recommended for action & bird photo hides too. Here the quality of the glass is of paramount importance and often the single biggest expense. If you choose to develop this kind of hide, we strongly recommend that you pay for the right quality glass, for which details are provided below. If the glass is of poor quality then all pictures taken through it will be distorted or not quite sharp enough, meaning users risk being be very unhappy.
- Best here are two glass brands, both Pyrolytic-coated and both with a mirror-glass effect. One is Japanese, and used by for example the ingenious and famous Hungarian

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photographer and hide designer Bence Maté. That glass is called **"AGC Stopsol Classic Clear 4 mm"**. In Europe, it is produced in Belgium and can be purchased through several providers. The other glass is French and is used by the prize-winning and creative Spanish photographer José Ruíz. It is called **"SSG Saint-Gobain REFLECTASOL"**. The white light colour version (5.500 k) is recommended. The glass should be cut to measure to fit the exact size you need.

- A window frame in anodized steel (prevents rust) is needed for the glass window. The window needs to be able to be opened inwards within that frame, with the hinges on the bottom and two stops prepared – one with just a few centimetres opening, to give the window an angle, so that the wildlife sees only the sky reflected and not themselves, and one at 90 degrees, so that the window front can be cleaned while sitting in the hide.
- A window shutter made in plywood or similar, hinged on the topside, is also needed to cover the window when the hide is not being used, or for when you need to clean the front side of the window. The shutter should preferably be adjustable up and down with a string **from inside the hide**.
- Keeping the window clean is of the outmost importance and this needs daily maintenance. Hide construction master Bence Maté uses a kitchen paper roll plus 10 % acetic acid. Raindrops on the window are a problem, so you need a long overhang of the roof, c 1000 mm.;
- When sunlight shines directly in through the glass wildlife can observe you and your movements. Hides should therefore also include black curtains hanging from a stiff wire or a runner along the inner roof, with holes cut in the curtain for each photo position to fit the lens through.
- The "Shoot-through-the-glass" hide is best for warmer places and seasons. If it is cold and damp outside, the single glass pane window will easily get fog/condensation on the inside if the ventilation is not very good. One way to solve this is to mount some small propeller fans beside the window, powered for example from a car battery or a solar panel located either on the roof of the hide or some distance away, out of sight.
- For photography in this type of hide photographers will need to bring their own tripods. Therefore the interior can be quite empty except for a place to sit comfortably and maybe a small shelf right under the window to store small items.

Further hide details:

- Ventilation through at least a high out-hole and low in-hole to regulate temperature; in hot areas more ventilation is needed and don't forget mosquito netting on the outside;
- Dark coloured mosquito netting over all ventilation holes as light grey mosquito netting is really difficult to look through;
- Wildlife watching operators that focus on large carnivores often want to have a high chimney tube to stop human scent from dispersing at ground level. These are often made of VVS plumbing pipes, connected together to create a 4-5 metre high chimney. Don't forget the U-bend on the top to stop rain water coming down through it.
- Overhanging roof, c 1000 mm, in order to protect camera lens fronts and windows from rain and snow;
- Normally no shoes inside the hide as it is much easier to keep clean that way. Keep boots and rubber boots outside under a roof in a dry place.
- Some operators put up black plastic cylinders on the outside of the shutter, so that something camera-lens-like is "poking out" from the walls all the time, also when there is no one there.
- The floor material surface should be silent and sound muffling. Many operators use plastic 10 mm ground insulation mats on top of the floor. They muffle noise and keep feet warmer, but are not good if visitors want to use tripods.
- Shelves above the window not too deep. Max 250 mm.

Important optional extras:

- A connected, separate dry toilet facility – this should be directly connected to the hide but in a separate room. The toilet should be designed with waste processing and any odours/smells in mind so as to not impact on the environment, the visitor experience or put off wildlife;
- Room for berths/beds – in narrow hides a berth/bench space can also act as a sitting bench. Beds can also fold down nicely from the back wall, there is standard kit to order for this if needed;
- It is a good idea to have a few extra tripods with ball heads available for clients who didn't bring theirs. Recommended are Gitzo, Benro and Manfrotto tripods, with Benro or Wimberley gimbal heads or Uniqball ball heads.
- An optional feature is insulation to protect from the weather and regulate the inside temperature. This could include floor and roof insulation. There are big technical differences in the requirements between very hot and very cold areas. Where it is very hot, a double roof with air in-between, can be considered.
- Short shelves for storage;
- Wi-Fi network connectivity and electricity to make it possible to charge cameras and upload images;
- Live webcam – to be considered in certain instances for PR and publicity reasons;
- Trap cameras can be very useful to find out the most suitable spots where the most wildlife move around and therefore the best places to erect a hide;
- A simple heating system. Butane gas heaters are the most common.

High end tourists

Hides for this target group should include all the features of the 'nature photography enthusiast hides' but also the following:

- More comfortable bed (double if possible) and planned for a couple only;
- Furnishings;
- Suitable interior wall material;
- Higher quality toilet facilities;
- Possibilities for imaginative food/drink provision, for example a fridge.

Factory-made hides/standard item hides

The only company that we know of today that delivers factory-built photo hides is Eero Kemilä, who developed these together with Kari Kemppainen in Finland. These are work-men cabin-like boxes, for max 3 photographers, that can be lifted onto location by a forest tractor. Insulated and ventilated, of good quality.

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Production of factory-made hides is also a possible new rewilding business development opportunity. Who will become Europe's first serious wildlife watching hide producer, catering for the explosion of wildlife hides that will come from the wildlife watching business gaining popularity in Europe?

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5. Ownership and maintenance

It is essential that all hides are operated and maintained by someone who cares about them and knows what they are doing! Often this may not be the same people/organisation who owns or manages the land, although it can be if that entity is experienced in wildlife tourism service provision. An active and engaged entrepreneur is absolutely fundamental for wildlife watching hides to become part of a good business.

The involvement of an entrepreneur/operator before designing a hide is crucially important both for building the hide and then for running it and selling access to it.

Building a hide is not difficult but filling it with paying clients is another thing altogether. Something to think of is also what number of people the hide can cater for. A wildlife hide should generally not have more than 4-5 people in it. If more, the exclusive experience feeling gets a bit lost.

On top of that, more people make more noise. Less people tend to keep quiet enough to not disturb the wildlife. On the other hand a good standard commercially viable group size is 8-12 people.

Most of the experienced wildlife hide entrepreneurs have several hides, either at the same place or in different places in the same general area. If the hides are set up in different sites/backgrounds/settings, then the clients tend to stay more nights/days and try also the next hide, and the next...

In planning and designing any wildlife hide, we very strongly recommend that the operator of that hide is identified at the earliest stage possible and strongly involved in, or even better, in charge of the planning and design process. This could be a local ecotourism company, a local hotelier or accommodation provider or a team from the relevant hunting ground owner, as long as they have the necessary skills, ambition and experience.

The operator or entrepreneur has to be responsible for all maintenance, cleaning, and servicing of the hides and the site.

6. Baiting or not, how and how not

The purpose of a hide is to view wildlife up close and therefore the ability to see wildlife from it on a regular basis will strongly influence the long term business success of the hide. Choosing a hide location in connection with features that naturally channel or attract wildlife, for example a permanent water source or a well-used river crossing, can be very useful for high quality wildlife viewing and is strongly recommended, even more so in hot and dry areas.

Baiting of wildlife is a very useful practice, but can also be very controversial. There is massive evidence of its efficiency in bringing in wildlife up close to the viewers. Therefore baiting is being used, in one way or the other, in the majority of all hide-based wildlife watching operations in Europe. Using everything from salt stones and birdseed at one end, to animal carcasses and road kills at the other, in order to attract wildlife.

This is of course nothing new. Feeding winter birds in our gardens is an age-old popular tradition, while feeding wildlife for wildlife management purposes has been done for centuries and for hunting purposes during millennia. Feeding wildlife is an extraordinarily common practice, since millennia back, but somehow when it is connected to wildlife watching tourism, it can sometimes become controversial. Maybe it is because wildlife watching tourism is a relatively new form of business and many people haven't yet gotten used to it? The reality is that today, we humans feed wildlife everywhere, whether we intend to or not. Maize fields are giant feeders of wild boar. Garbage dumps are feeders of crows, rats, gulls and many more. Gardens and orchards attract a host of species. We influence very many species and all the time. Maybe we should also look at influencing species in good ways? So they keep off the highway, so that less sheep are killed, or so that they become worth money instead of just incurring cost?

In Europe, there is not a single documented case of wildlife having been put more at risk because of being used to visit feeding stations, drinking pools or any other sites set up by operators of wildlife watching or wildlife photography hides. We want to keep it that way.

Baiting is nonetheless something to be considered very carefully and is only to be used after a good assessment of the impact, risks and benefits for people and the environment of baiting in the respective location. We mean that the following criteria are key conditions to success:

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- In order to minimize the risk of disturbance in both directions, the site shall be located well off the track and not on, or near major hiking or biking routes, nor near frequented roads that have wide public access.
- For hides targeting large carnivores, keep the site at least 4 kilometres from the nearest livestock grazing grounds and any inhabited house.
- Keep the site clean, cleaning it either on a weekly or daily basis depending on what it looks like. Plus a very thorough clean-up at least after each season. This has an important effect on the guest experience. We all want these sites to be wonderful, natural sites, not something looking like someone's backyard or garbage dump.
- Come to a clear agreement with the landowner or land manager.
- Get all necessary permits and follow the rules.
- See to it that no signs of the feeding activity are visible from the hide.

The Rewilding Enterprise team will be able to advise, drawing upon the experience of professional photographers and wildlife watching entrepreneurs across Europe.

Human introduced bait

The selection of food provided as bait at wildlife photography hides needs to be decided after thorough investigation. The food needs to be as close as possible to the normal food sources available to the species concerned in the (large) area where the hides are located. For use of animal matter, a permit from the regional veterinary authorities is in most cases required. There is no general EU law currently banning the feeding of wildlife with animal matter but regional and national legislation can impose some restrictions on this. Potential ways to address this is in that case to apply for a "pilot project" over a number of years, to test and study it, since wildlife watching in most locations and countries is a completely new industry.

Different kinds of bait

1. **Vegetable-based products** including bird seed, fruit, dried figs, dried dates, nuts – (squirrels, ermines, martens, birds);
2. **Grains and maize/corn** – (geese, ducks, swans and cranes, small birds, bears);
3. **Salt lick and ensilage** (lactic acid treated hay), hay, grain – (bison, cattle, moose, boar and deer);
4. **Fish** – (herons, pelicans, gulls and storks);
5. **Large carcasses** such as pigs, sheep, horses, cows – (vultures, eagles, bears, wolves, wolverines, jackals and foxes);
6. **Small carcasses** such as pigeons, hens, grouse birds, road kills – (bears, goshawk, eagles, foxes, jays);
7. **Honey, molasses, syrup, dog food** – (Bears, badgers, foxes);
8. **Fruit**, like apples or plums – (Bears and boar, but also risk to be very visible in the images)
9. **Corn** (dried). Also very visible and spreads all over the place, does not look that good. Best hidden in troughs out of view, or spread out loosely.

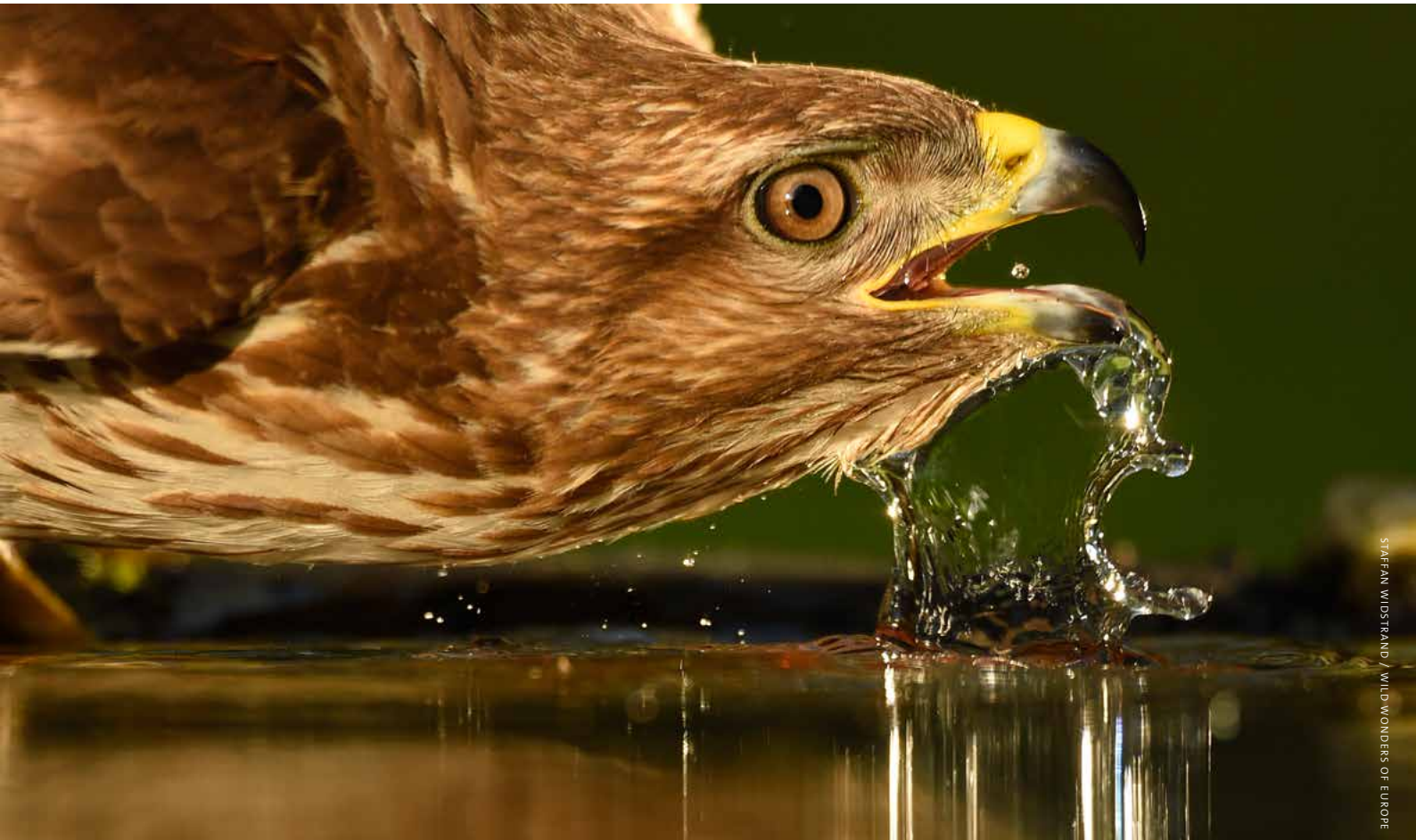
Please note: Lynx and wild cats virtually never visit bait sites. Iberian lynx tend to hang around places where rabbits are released from breeding facilities. Almost all cats though, wild or domestic, are attracted to flower species like Catnip and Valerian.

7. Further reading and web links

'Wildlife Photography Hides in Europe' is about 448 wildlife watching hides in Europe, where 71 different operators in 18 European countries are described, from which you can photograph in total over 340 mammal and bird species. It is a publication produced by "Bureau des Guides" (The Guide Office), a not-for-profit organization of nature guides based in Luxemburg. You can download it as a pdf version and it costs €21 euro, all included. It can be ordered via publications@guidesoffice.eu

Read more at www.bureaudesguides.eu/nl/publicaties/wildlife-photography-hides-in-europe-nl#.U8z7eKiDQaU

A selection of experienced hide-operators and their web sites:
www.hidephotography.com
www.josebruiz.com
www.connylundstrom.com/en
www.birdinginspain.com
www.norway-nature.com
www.skuanature.com/skua_nature/SKUA_NATURE.html
www.sveinwik.com
www.atnatureza.org
www.focusonmedwild.com
www.photo-logistics.com
www.wildwatchingspain.com
www.birdsafarisweden.com
www.nordinature.se
www.gabitour.com
www.neophron.com
www.naturetours.ee
www.arcticmedia.fi
www.viiksimo.fi
www.martinselkonen.fi
www.sakertour.com
www.finnature.fi



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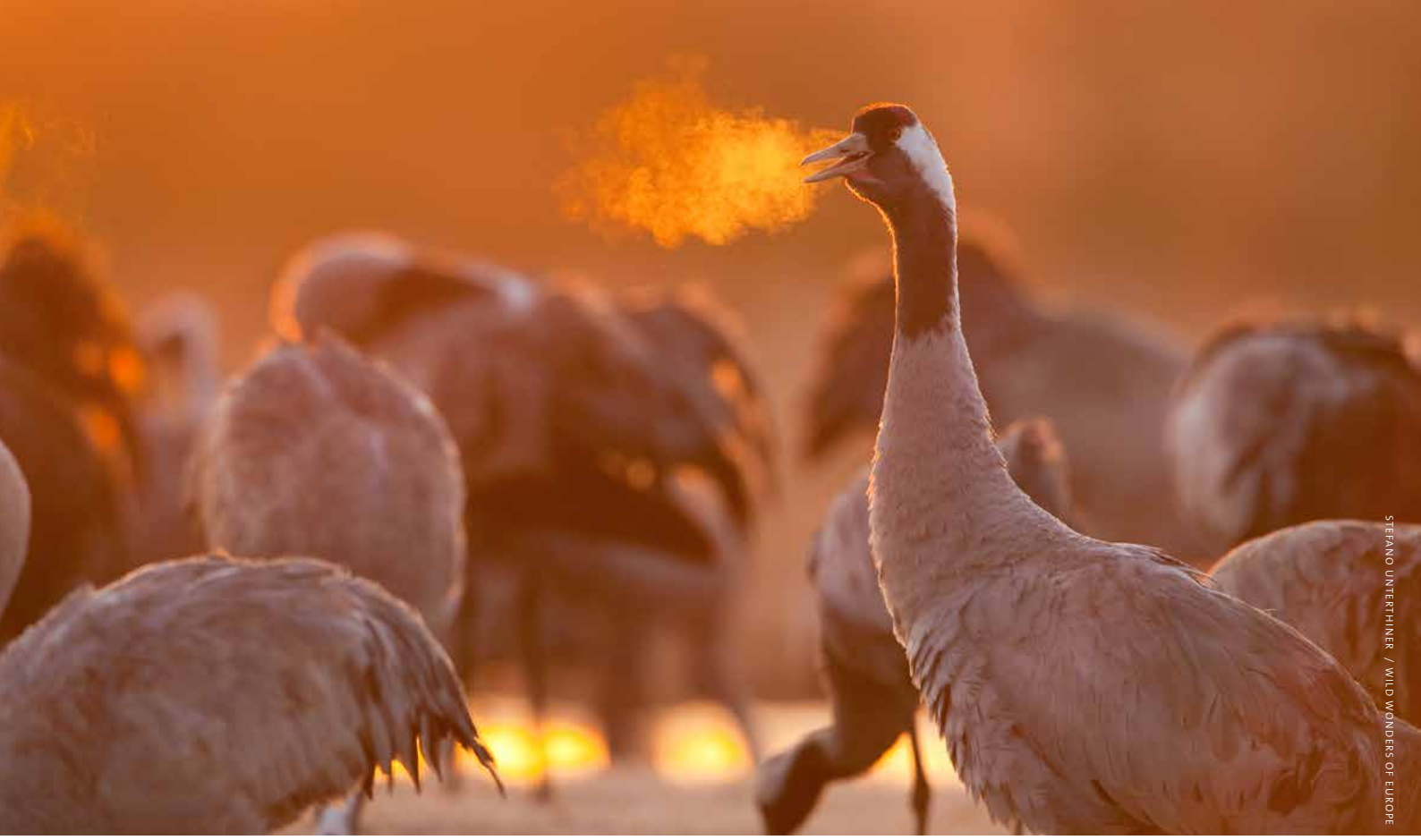

STEFANO UNTERTHINER / WILD WONDERS OF EUROPE

8. Case studies and analysis

The following are a selection of wildlife watching hide designs from different places, where we have tried to analyse positive and negative features of each design. Please note that we are only making some broad observations based upon what we can see in the photographs included. For example, we do not comment on the interior if we can only see the exterior. The checklist at the foot of each section ranges from green for 'good' and red for 'poor'.

At the end here is a section with technical drawings of a couple of standard hide design solutions, trying to weigh in the vast experience of our team from about 60 different hide designs. These drawings can be put in the hands of pretty much any builder, and a very good hide could be delivered. They come in different versions and with some add-ons. These will be developed further and also new styles of hides will be added. Your comments about possible improvements are welcome!

GRZEGORZ LESNIEWSKI / WILD WONDERS OF EUROPE

MAGNUS ELANDER / WILD WONDERS OF EUROPE

Permanent cabin hide

Source: http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1452017

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Permanent structure;
- Poor hide with limited consideration on the requirements of any user.

Positives

- Relatively discrete colours;
- Potentially moveable, lifting it using the hooks in each corner.

Negatives

- Concrete base;
- Aesthetically inappropriate in the open country;
- Limited rain protection;
- No covered access;
- Seemingly no windows to look through – only photo holes and no cover for the cameras – wildlife can see the user.

Permanent cabin hide

Source: http://www.wildsweden.com/news/big-bear-in-front-of-hide/

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Large hide partially built in local style;
- Poor situation in unsightly landscape in front of the hide (possibly due to over baiting).

Positives

- Suitable photo holes and windows;
- Heating furnace inside with chimney;
- Covered access.

Negatives

- Indiscreet, non-moveable, permanent hide;
- Aesthetically poor design;
- Large impact on the landscape;
- The wildlife, especially bears, have destroyed the immediate vegetation;
- Bones and carcass remains litter the area making it unappealing for photographers.

Cabin hide / semi mobile

Source: http://www.pbase.com/image/132531171

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Factory-built hide from Eero Kemilä from Finland.

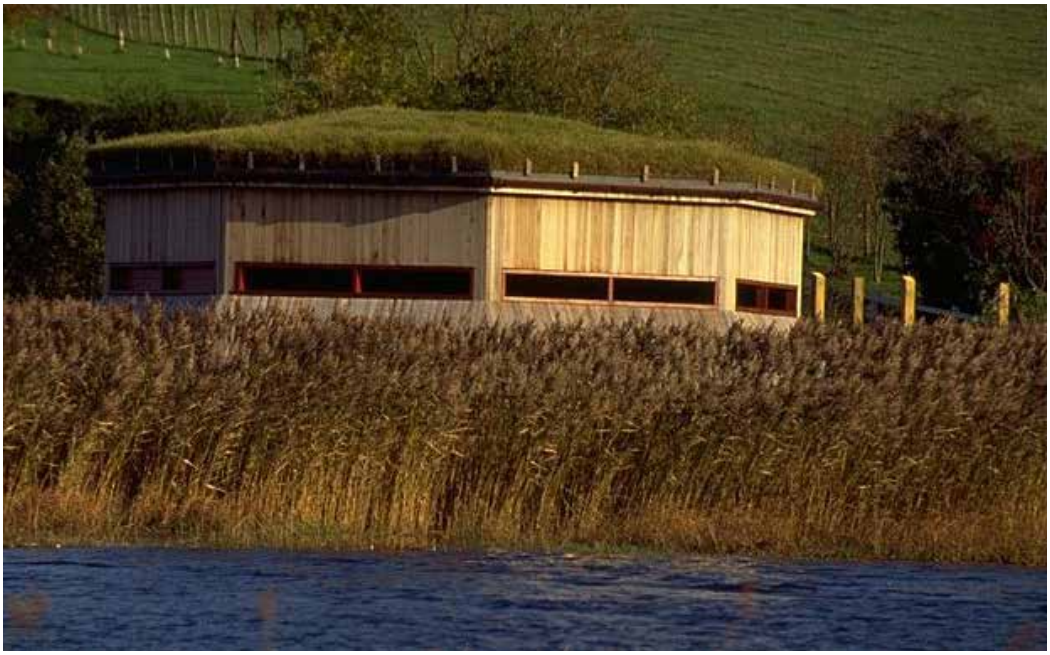
Positives

- Insulated, dry, warm;
- Panoramic windows above the camera holes with reflective glass;
- Moveable – even without machinery;
- Chimney to spread human smell at a higher level (6 metres up);
- Discrete colour.

Negatives

- Simple workman cabin look;
- 2-4 person capacity (this is low for the size and structure of the hide);
- No covered access;
- Roof does not cover lenses against the rain although the flaps do.

Permanent public hide



Source: http://www.virtualvisit-northernireland.com/

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Public hide – probably in a national park;
- Wildlife is too far away and the hide is too far above water for photographers;
- Aesthetically OK with efforts to blend into the landscape.

Positives

- Grass roof – blends into landscape;
- Wood walls – should be sourced locally and sustainably ;
- Suitable for interpretation / talks with large groups;
- Covered access.

Negatives

- Looks a bit like a military bunker;
- Poor functionality and structure for photographers;
- Large viewing holes – wildlife can see users;
- Viewing holes high on the wall – not suitable for photographers;
- 25 metres of reeds in front of the hide;
- Unlikely to generate revenue.

Visitor centre

Source: http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/8615010.article

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Beautifully designed, publicly financed public visitors centre. Excellent example of what modern visitors centres possibly should look like;
- This is NOT a hide – it functions as an observation deck;
- Visitor centres can either be important for nature tourism development or extremely detrimental to it depending on how they are run.

Positives

- Design elegance. Wheelchair access and nice view / interpretation possibilities;
- Perfect nature tourism agency location, a hub for visitors;
- Concealed entrance when viewed from ground level along the path.

Negatives

- Limited commercial value beyond selling refreshments and souvenirs;
- Unlikely to generate revenue;
- Poor functionality for photographers.

Permanent tower hide

Source: Staffan Widstrand / Rewilding Europe

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Hunting towers in Velebit, Croatia. Hunters have very different needs and requests compared to photo enthusiasts and wildlife watchers. Hunters need the animal at a reasonable distance with a clear shot. In Eastern Europe they often use a tower to get off the ground so the animals cannot smell them easily, and so the terrain stops the bullet. These are well built tower for 1-2 people, but not ideal for photography.

Positives

- Reasonably comfortable to sit in;
- Visitors are protected against weather;
- Use of local materials.

Negatives

- High angle, wildlife watchers and photo enthusiasts prefer ground level;
- Limited capacity;
- Wildlife can see the people inside and the camera poking out;
- Poor rain protection for the lens;
- No covered access;
- Mosquitoes have easy access.

Permanent cabin hide / semi mobile

Source: Staffan Widstrand / Wild Wonders of Europe (http://www.wild-wonders.com/)

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Classic Finnish design;
- This operator has 15 hides like this in the area. All are moveable by snowmobile during winter. They usually move a couple of them each year and charge €200 – €250 per night per person;
- Reasonable facilities including insulated sitting benches, simple bunk beds and biological toilet;
- This is a 5–6 person hide.

Positives

- Panoramic observation window at eyelevel above the photo holes;
- Mobile functionality;
- Rain protection from the roof;
- Windows and photo holes across three directions.

Negatives

- Primitive straightforward looks.

Permanent cabin hide

Source:http://www.spatiawildlife.com/en/willdife-photography-netrwork-of-permanent-hides/index.html

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Complimentary and sensitive to the landscape with natural colours and constructed with local materials.

Positives

- Ground level with low profile;
- Not obnoxious, although it is permanent;
- Aesthetically pleasing in the open landscape;
- Mirror glass with separate photo holes.

Negatives

- Small, limited to 2–3 persons;
- Only one photo direction;
- No covered access;
- Permanent construction;
- Windows beside the photo holes; they would be better placed above the photo holes.

Permanent cabin hide

Source: http://www.hidephotography.com/getpage.php?pg=one_hide&hid=6

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Dedicated photo hide with 2–3 people capacity;
- The specific hides in these photos are some of the most sought after and most revenue generating hides in Europe and in our view provide one of the strongest examples of a subtle, innovative hide with minimal impact on the landscape.

Positives

- Discrete, low profile;
- Covered with material fitting the landscape – in this case grass;
- "Shoot-through-the-window" mirror glass;
- Ventilation system;
- Rain cover for the lenses;
- Not obnoxious, although it is permanent;
- Concealed trench entrance.

Negatives

- Permanent construction.

Permanent cabin hide

Source: http://www.hidephotography.com/

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Professional looking ground level hide;
- The specific hides in these photos are some of the most sought after and most revenue generating hides in Europe and in our view provide one of the strongest examples of a subtle, innovative hide with minimal impact on the landscape.

Positives

- Mirror glass;
- Low angle / ground level;
- Good rain cover;
- Grass on roof.

Negatives

- Permanent, concrete and steel structure;
- Orange colour too visually disturbing – although may blend well with the grass and bank in drier periods.

Permanent hide

Source: http://www.spatiawildlife.com/en/willdife-photography-netrwork-of-permanent-hides/index.html

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Using old barns, sheds, houses, stonewalls etc is a great way to camouflage hides, especially in open landscapes;
- A good idea to develop a hide using an existing building or ruined stone wall with minimum impact on the local environment.

Positives

- Appealing design, in, or in the same shape as traditional structures/sheds/houses;
- Using existing building as hide – no new impact on landscape;
- Natural temperature control.

Negatives

- Anticipated to have an awkward photo shooting functionality.

Permanent hide

Source: http://www.kaingo.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Hippo-Hide-2.jpg

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Water side hide in Africa;
- Dual functionality for general public and nature lovers.

Positives

- Camouflaged, blends in well with the environment;
- Covered access;
- Natural materials;
- No concrete – minimal impact on environment;
- Close proximity to wildlife.

Negatives

- Not comfortable;
- Potentially dangerous;
- Wildlife can see the visitors:
- No cover for cameras if it rains.

Permanent hide

Source: Wild Wonders of Europe (http://www.wild-wonders.com/)

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Stone hide for great bustards in La Serena, Extremadura, Spain;
- €100 per day;
- These particular hides are fully booked the entire season!

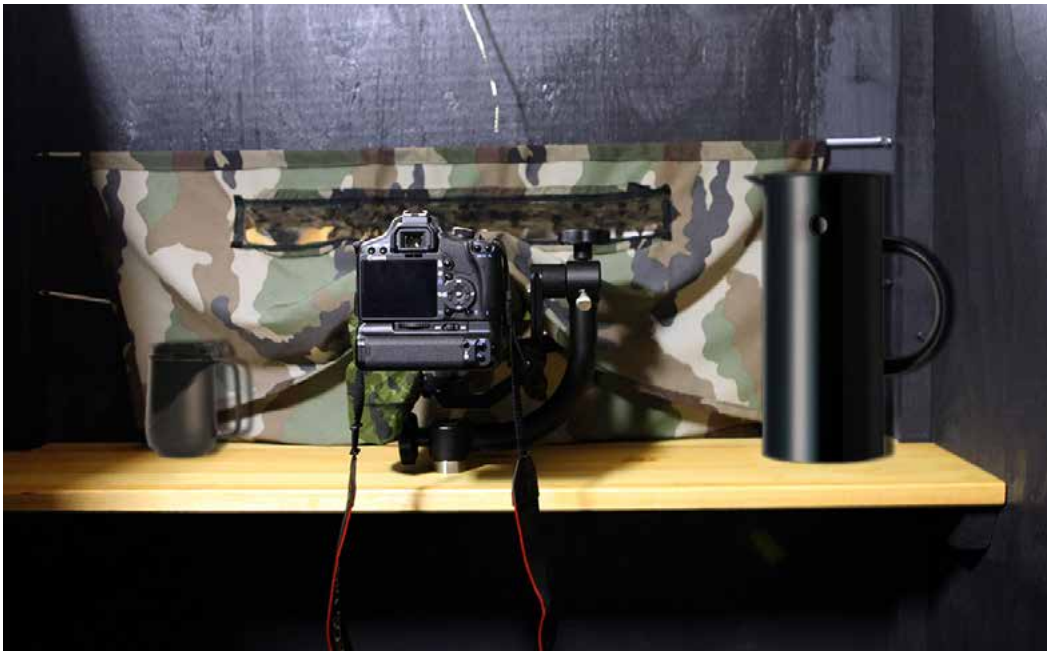
Positives

- It is in the right place for the wildlife;
- Roof is rainproof;
- Old classic stone hut used – no new construction

Negatives

- Sandy, dusty, sand floor (bad for camera gear);
- Very small – single person capacity with limited photo shoot options;
- Very cold in morning, very hot during day;
- Very uncomfortable;
- The tin roof is very non-natural looking.

Permanent cabin hide



Source: http://www.fotothing.com/photos/158/158bea08fd23c61922938f6e44da9f94_c67.jpg

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Typical old style photo hole in primitive hide.

Positives

- The swivel arm / ball head is great to use;
- The bench is reasonably thick but should be even thicker;
- There is a hole and a screw to mount the ball head / swivel arm with;
- Textile covering the camera lens.

Negatives

- Very poor visibility other than through the camera;
- Very difficult for action or bird photo;
- Very boring for a non-photographer;
- No windows.

Visitor centre

Source: http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/home/small-projects-part-2/

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- General public visitor centre with limited appeal for photography enthusiasts.

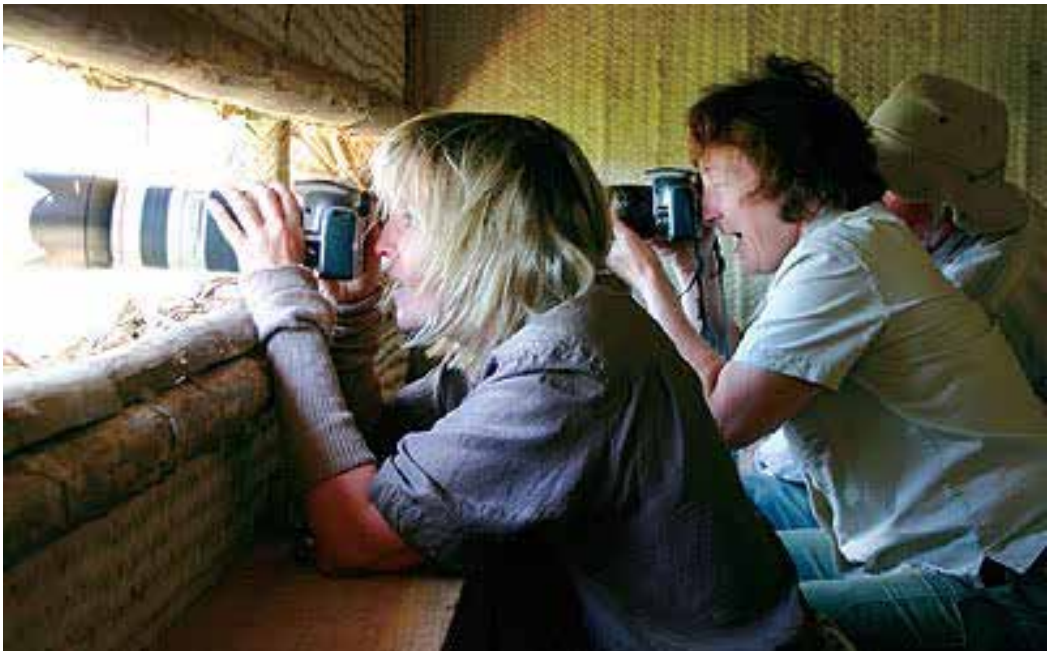
Positives

- Wooden material (should be locally sourced);
- Variable height benches to attach cameras to;
- Views across two sides;
- Mirror glass.

Negatives

- Wildlife will see you through the gaps in the wood;
- Aesthetically does not blend into the landscape;
- No shooting holes for cameras;
- Far away and elevated position from the wildlife.

Permanent hide



Source:http://www.egnu.com/country_info/kenya/images/aberdare_003.html

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- African public hide.

Positives

- The visitors are visible, but this hide is designed more for the protection of humans from the wildlife;
- Aesthetically well designed mat walls.

Negatives

- Open side with no covering so the wildlife can see the user;
- Mosquitos will be able to enter the hide;
- Bench far too low for any ball head arrangement and the bench prevents tripod usage.

Permanent hide

Source: Wild Wonders of Europe (http://www.wild-wonders.com/)

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A top quality hide, where you shoot through the mirror glass;
- Well positioned by a fish pond.

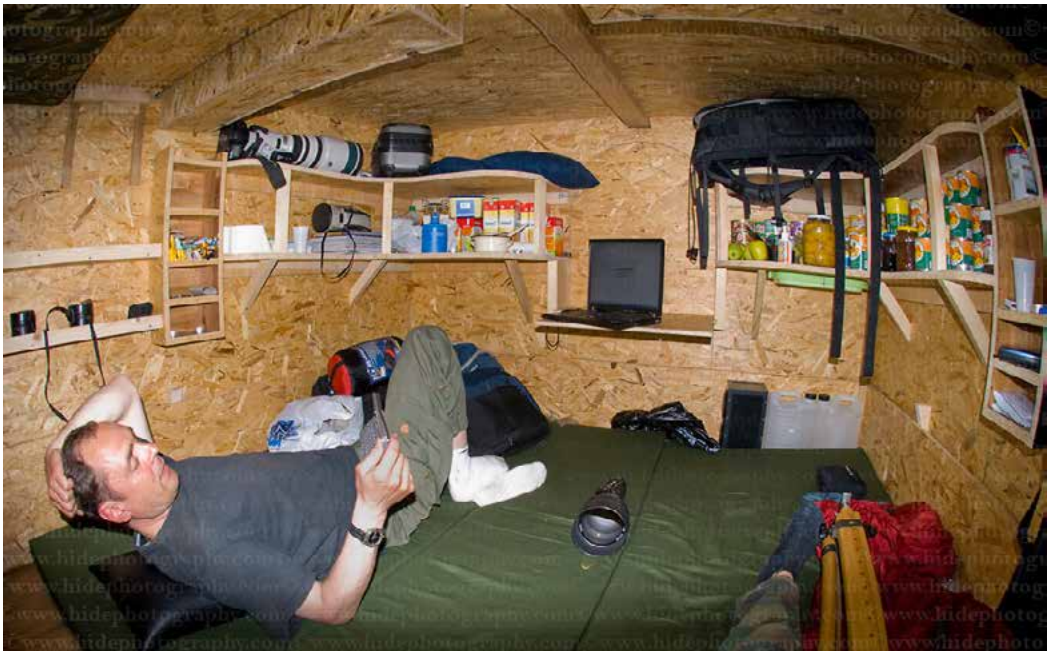
Positives

- Mirror glass of top quality;
- Big windows makes it suitable for the wildlife watcher and photographer;
- Close to the wildlife;
- Flexible in its functionality.

Negatives

- Permanent construction.

Permanent hide



Source: http://hidephotography.com/getpage.php?pg=search&sr=Egretta%20garzetta

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- The interior shows good use of shelving and space for mattresses;
- Top quality hide designed for low-angle photography (see next picture);
- Not designed for any other user.

Positives

- Shelves and spacing for equipment;
- Floor mattresses.
- Built specially for photography enthusiasts.

Negatives

- No benches for sitting;
- Not aesthetically pleasing;
- No standing room.

Permanent hide

Source:http://hidephotography.com

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Top quality hide designed for low-angle photography;
- Maybe not an interior design winner, but for serious photography it is great;
- The mirror glass result can easily be seen here – birds 1 metre away.

Positives

- Mirror glass of top quality;
- Curtain to limit the wildlife's vision into the hide when sun shines in;
- Ground level;
- Storage shelves;
- Big window – full flexibility;
- Built specially for photography enthusiasts.

Negatives

- 2 or max 3 people capacity;
- Not aesthetically pleasing;
- Permanent construction.

Permanent hide

Source: http://www. jensbirch.smugmug.com

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Specifically designed for photography enthusiasts;
- Primitive but efficient;
- Space for 1–2 photographers.

Positives

- For a nature photo enthusiast a decent design and functionality;
- Variable shooting level including floor level;
- Heating (good in Northern or mountain climates;
- Looks insulated;
- Padded chair;
- The tripod-head mount arms – a creative solution that would seem to work, especially if there is a slider as well in-out on the arm.

Negatives

- No viewing panel above the camera hole makes it very difficult to follow action and birds;
- A panoramic view window right across and above the shooting holes is crucially important;
- Not aesthetically pleasing;
- The primitive feeling.

General public sleepover hide

Source: http://www.findtripinfo.com/south-africa/mpumalanga/kruger-park-accommodation.html, http://www.safarinow.com/go/ShipandaniSleepoverHideKrugerNationalParkSANParks

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A public wildlife watching hide in South Africa;
- Beds fold up against the wall to provide for comfortable overnight accommodation.

Positives

- Good use of local materials and design;
- Mosquito mesh over flaps covering viewing hole;
- Study bench for attaching camera;
- Well designed overnight functionality;
- Comfortable;
- Viewing from three sides.

Negatives

- No reflective glass or canvas to cover user;
- Permanent structure;
- Far away from the wildlife;
- Angle too high for photography enthusiasts.

Permanent hide

Source: http://www.outdoorphoto.co.za/forums/showthread.php?13216-Help-Giants-Castle

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A vulture watching hide in South Africa located next to a vulture nesting site.

Positives

- Unobtrusive in the landscape;
- Concealed entrance with access from around the corner;
- Constructed using local materials;
- Large mirror glass viewing windows above covered camera shooting holes;
- Rain protection;
- Benches for securing cameras;
- Wide viewing angle.

Negatives

- Permanent;
- Concrete base;
- Need to stand up to see out the window.

Permanent hide

Source: http://www.rukakuusamo.com

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A bear viewing hide for nature lovers and photography enthusiasts.

Positives

- Eye-level panoramic viewing windows in mirror glass;
- Separate canvas covered camera holes;
- Two camera holes per person, four for the corner person;
- Viewing from at least two angles;
- Comfortable chairs.

Negatives

- Not very good looking design;
- Missing a bench suitable to mount camera on.

Permanent hide

Source: SKUA Nature/Ultima Frontera, Danube Delta, Romania

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Professional hide, rightly placed by a place where bee eaters perch regularly;
- A permanent construction, dug into the ground, but in a farm area, which is not purely wild anyway and there are many other houses and shacks around. A "shoot-through the window" hide. Note the angle of the glass pane, leaning inwards, so the sky is reflected and not the motif seeing itself in the mirror glass.

Positives

- Mirror glass hide;
- Big windows makes it good also for the wildlife watcher;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- Very simple.

Negatives

- Permanent construction.

Mobile hide

Source: SKUA Nature/Ultima Frontera, Danube Delta, Romania

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Primitive car-based hide, with army-style camo netting.

Positives

- Electric car = silent, less disturbing and somewhat less polluting (if it isn't charged by a dieselpowered generator...).

Negatives

- Not a very good shooting platform;
- The netting makes you partly visible inside, if you move your body at all;
- Netting makes photography difficult, and viewing too;
- Not stable, but quite shaky;
- Very temporary, almost desperate solution for exceptional cases.

Semi-mobile hide

Source: SKUA Nature/Ultima Frontera, Danube Delta, Romania

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A very basic, simple schack/box for the real photo enthusiasts only;
- Difficult to charge a higher price for, unless something very exceptional is a regular visitor in front of it.

Positives

- Mirror glass hide;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- Easily moveable by hand for two people;
- Probably does the job, but only for a few hours at a time.

Negatives

- 1-2 pax only, very primitive looking, not-expensive or elegant at all. Looks ugly in a wild area;
- Not comfortable.

Permanent hide

Source: SKUA Nature/Ultima Frontera, Danube Delta, Romania

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Professional hide, rightly placed by a place where bee eaters perch regularly
- A permanent construction, dug into the ground, but in a farm area, which is not purely wild anyway and there are other houses and shacks around. A "shoot-through the window" hide.

Positives

- Mirror glass hide;
- Big windows makes it good also for the wildlife watcher;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- Very simple;
- Quite discrete, non-obtrusive placement in the terrain.

Negatives

- Permanent construction;
- Small size, for 1 max 2 pax.

Mobile floating hide

Source: SKUA Nature/Ultima Frontera, Danube Delta, Romania

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Boat hide.

Positives

- Protection from sun and rain and some wind;
- Might be efficient when it comes to sneaking up on riverside wildlife.

Negatives

- Probably it doesnt really fool the wildlife, they can see straight through the netting and every movement;
- It also limits the photographers vision and shooting capabilities, compared to an open boat;
- Quite uncomfortable.

Permanent hide

Source: SKUA Nature/Ultima Frontera, Danube Delta, Romania

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Professional hide, rightly placed by a place where bee eaters perch regularly
- A permanent construction, dug into the ground, but in a farm area, which is not purely wild anyway and there are many other houses and shacks around. A "shoot-through the window" hide. Note the angle of the glass pane, leaning inwards, so the sky is reflected and not the motif seeing itself in the mirror glass.

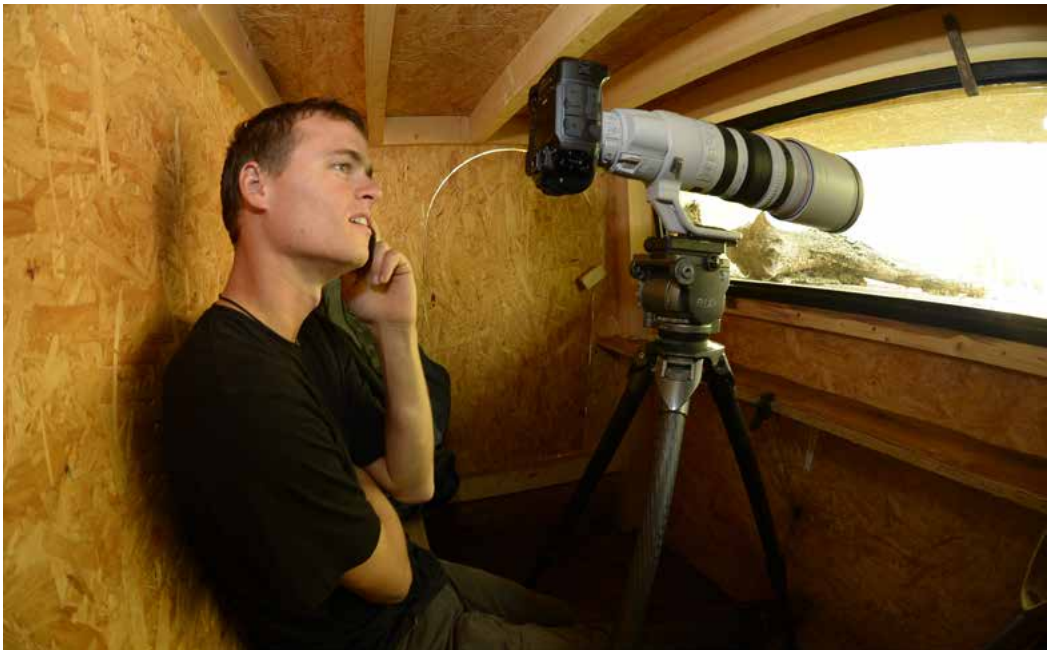
Positives

- Mirror glass hide;
- Big windows makes it good also for the wildlife watcher;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- Very simple, not very obtrusive, looks elegant with the grass growth on top of the roof.

Negatives

- Permanent construction;
- A bit too small, 1 maybe 2 pax.

Permanent hide



Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, Pusztaszer, Hungary

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Bence himself in this very simple, box-hide, at a watering station. It is dug down in the ground and built in the most cost-effective way.

Positives

- Mirror glass hide (note the glass pane leaning a bit inwards);
- Big window makes it better also for the nature lover/wildlife watcher;
- Close, close to the subjects, 4–5 metres away;
- Very low-cost construction, still does the job very well, after over 10 years here;
- Note the door solution and the small shelf.

Negatives

- Permanent construction, including the water dam outside, in concrete. But nothing obtrusive in a farm area;
- It is very hot in the late spring/summer. No ventilation more than when the window is open.

Permanent hide

Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, Pusztaszer, Hungary

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Another very simple, dug down box-hide, at a farm, built in the most cost-effective way.

Positives

- Mirror glass hide (note the glass pane covered by the wooden shutter, now that no one is in the hide);
- Big window makes it better also for the nature lover/wildlife watcher;
- Close, close to the subjects, 4–5 metres away. Nothing obtrusive-looking in a farm area;
- Very low-cost construction, still does the job very well, after over 10 years here;
- Note the door solution and the simple but good roof cover material. Roof pointing out far longer than normal houses, which protects the camera gear from rain, but also from the sun.

Negatives

- Permanent construction that cannot be moved. But all built in organic materials that will disappear eventually;
- It is very hot in the late spring/summer. No ventilation more than when the window is open.

Permanent tower hide

Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, Pusztaszer, Hungary

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A permanent hide on poles up in the air, near the (artificial) breeding sites of starlings, roller, stork and swifts. This is the only case when hides on stilts or in towers are useful: when the motif is up high, too!

Positives

- Mirror glass hide;
- Big windows makes it good also for the nature lover;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- Simple construction.

Negatives

- Permanent construction, but it is on a farm, ten metres from the farm house;
- A bit too synthetic feeling, with nestboxes, arranged nest platforms etc, all for the images...

Permanent tower hide

Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, Pusztaszer, Hungary

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

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- This is the only case when hides on stilts or in towers are useful: when the motif is up high, too!

Positives

- Mirror glass hide;
- Big windows makes the view good also for the nature lover;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- It is on a farm, ten metres from the farm house;
- Simple construction. It gets the job done!

Negatives

- Permanent construction;
- A bit too synthetic feeling, with nestboxes, arranged nest platforms etc, all for the images...;
- Very primitive interior.

Permanent underwater hide

Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, Pusztaszer, Hungary

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- This is the entrance to a submerged underwater hide, with panorama mirror glass windows and extreme comfort;
- One of the most impressive pieces of engineering when it comes to hides anywhere. You sit in a comfortable swivel chair, under the waters surface, with floor heating, air condition and photograph just right above the water level.

Positives

- Mirror glass hide with great comfort and very discreet from the outside;
- In an old fish pond, so not wilderness anyway;
- Big windows makes the view good also for the nature lover;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- It is on a farm, 200 metres from the farm house;
- Very advanced. Extreme possibilities for photography, very good!
- Top of the line!

Negatives

- Permanent construction;
- Very, very expensive and difficult to build.

Permanent underwater hide

Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, Pusztaszer, Hungary

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

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- It is on a farm, 200 metres from the farm house;
- Very advanced. Extreme possibilities for photography, very good!
- Top of the line! Wall matts cover the walls, to avoid noice;
- See also the Uniqball ballhead mounted on the metal bar in front of the window.

Negatives

- Permanent construction;
- Very, very expensive and difficult to build.

Permanent underwater hide

Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, Pusztaszer, Hungary

	Exterior	Interior
General public	■	■
Nature lovers	■	■
Photography enthusiasts	■	■
High-end tourists	■	■

General comments

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- It is on a farm, 200 metres from the farm house;
- Very advanced. Extreme possibilities for photography, very good!
- Top of the line! Wall matts cover the walls, to avoid noice;
- See also the Uniqball ballhead mounted on the metal bar in front of the window.
- And the boom coming from the side, to hold the camera, mounted on a vertical roof-to-floor metal pillar. Also please note the Sachtler, hydraulic tripod head on the boom. A very useful Top of the line device.

Negatives

- Permanent construction;
- Very, very expensive and difficult to build.

Permanent tower hide

Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, Pusztaszer, Hungary

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A very low-cost and intelligent construction. A simple mirrorglass hide that does the job.

Positives

- Mirror glass hide;
- Big windows makes it good also for the nature lover;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- Note the window pane leaning a bit inwards, to avert the mirror effect of the motif, and also bring some ventilation. The small shelf and the beanch ade from oakwood, with a leaning, padded backrest. Sitting cushions are missing, and could be brought for each visitor and then taken back with them. See also the angle of the front wall undr the window, which is leaning inward, to accomodate for photographers' tripod legs. Also note the black curtain on a wire, , for when the sun is shing into the hide and the camera lens can be poked out through a round hole in the curtain. The "box" is quite easily moveable.

Negatives

- Permanent construction around it;
- Bench is very hard;
- No ventilation other than the window gap.

Permanent hide

Source: ?

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A public open hide, pretty useless for nature photographers. But the ballhead solution is super good.

Positives

- A great camera ballhead mount, that can be moved around on the bench.

Negatives

- Open windows, showing the visitors in full view to the wildlife;
- No windows at all, leaving the visitor exposed to the weather;
- Hide is placed too high in relation to water surface;
- No curtains;
- A really useless hide.

Permanent hide

Source: Bence Maté Hide photography, South Africa

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- Another successful hide construction by Bence Maté, this time in south Africa.

Positives

- Mirror glass hide;
- Big windows makes it suiting also for the wildlife watching nature lover;
- Comfortable chairs for a half-day sejour;
- For tripod users;
- Floor easy to clean.

Negatives

- No beds;
- Wheels on the floor risk creating some noice.

Mobile hide

Source: Jari Peltomäki/Finnature, in Liminka Finland

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A specialised black grouse hide, designed so that you can move it around from day to day, by one man, in order to get the right angle to the grouse;
- Note the whole front section that comes down as you close it when you leave.

Positives

- Obersvation windows of mirrorglass, but shooting is through the camera holes, two , in front, low;
- Close, close to the subjects;
- Very flexible;
- Low cost production that does the job;
- Sleeping bag and a big mattress is provided;
- If in the right site, you can charge a lot for the product.

Negatives

- Very ugly and primitive looking;
- For 1 or maybe 2 pax only;
- Not perfect for heavy rains or really wet ground.

Mobile hide

Source: Jari Peltomäki/Finnature, in Liminka Finland

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General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
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- Close, close to the subjects;
- Very flexible;
- Low cost production that does the job;
- Sleeping bag and a big mattress is provided;
- Since it is in an excellent site, the owner can charge a lot for the product, despite the low techincal level.

Negatives

- Very ugly and primitive looking;
- For 1 or maybe 2 pax only;
- Not perfect for heavy rains or really wet ground.

Permanent hide

Source: Staffan Widstrand / Rewilding Europe

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A vulture watching hide in Madzharovo, Bulgaria;
- A hide that is well proven to do its job.

Positives

- Obersvation windows of mirrorglass, but shooting is through the camera holes;
- Observation windows at eye level;
- Local materials that blend well in the landscape.

Negatives

- A bit primitive;
- .

Floating pontoon hide

Source: Staffan Widstrand / Arctic Safaris

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

General comments

- A floating pontoon hide in Båtsfjord, Varanger, Norway;
- Specialised for arctic ducks that gather here in the winter;
- One of the most economically successful floating hides in Europe;
- Anchored at both ends in a place where the arctic ducks gather every day (a fish cleaning factory that dumps the leftovers in the same place).

Positives

- Does the job;
- Low shooting angle thanks to the very low camera holes;
- Provides some shelter against adverse weather.

Negatives

- Pretty ugly and primitive looking;
- The pontoon is not balanced, uncomfortable for the photographers;
- For 2 or maybe 3 pax only;
- Very urban surroundings.

Floating pontoon hide

Source: Staffan Widstrand / Arctic Safaris

	Exterior	Interior
General public		
Nature lovers		
Photography enthusiasts		
High-end tourists		

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