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Photographing Kingfishers - by Wildlife Photographer Kevin Keatley



Most of the year kingfishers are territorial and regularly patrol their stretch of river. An added perch put into the bank makes an ideal vantage point for the kingfisher to stop and if you're lucky, fish from. This is a great bonus for wildlife photography. You have the chance to pick your location. Face north for the time around mid-day, face west for an early start and east for the afternoon. When you're setting up check your background. Make sure there are no distracting branches. For a soft out of focus background you need at least a couple of metres behind the subject. When setting up the perch and hide try to get them on the same level. Photos always look much better when you are eye to eye.

Kingfishers can be very tolerant of a hide and may even use the hide instead of the perch. I've also found this with robins sitting on top of my hide just a few centimetres above my head... at times like that you have to sit back and smile.

After setting up the hide, the river life gets back to its normal routine. It could be just a few minutes before a kingfisher comes by (although sometimes much longer). A steady flowing clear river with lots of minnows is an ideal habitat. Look out for white droppings on overhanging branches. Kingfishers nest in the banks of rivers, look out for their holes usually above 2m on a steep-side bank. Kingfishers are protected by law and a licence is needed to photograph them at or near the nest. Contact English Nature for more information 01733 455000. In Scotland contact Scottish Natural Heritage 01738 444177.



Always remember that the welfare of your subject is more important than the photos. While in the hide on the riverbank I've watched and, if I'm lucky, photographed and filmed other wildlife including dippers, grey wagtails, mink and even little egrets. A pair of egrets came slowly down the river hunting in the shallows just a couple of metres from my hide totally unaware of my presence.



One spot I use is on a shingle bank at the bend of the river. I set a perch up on the edge of the river and the hide a couple of metres back. It's difficult to peg the hide down on the shingle bank but on still days the dome hide doesn't need pegging down, but when it's windy I put stones in the pockets around the base of the hide. This works well as you can move the hide around without getting out. It's not uncommon to spend five or six hours at a time in the hide slowly moving it with the light as the sun tracks across the sky.

I never get bored of watching and waiting for the kingfisher to come by. There is always something happening on the river and time passes as I think of what shots I want to get. Long lens and wide aperture for a close portrait with soft out of focus background. Wide angle small aperture to include the river and habitat. For a close wide angle use another camera on a tripod close to the perch and cable release back to the hide. Use camouflage over the tripod and camera to make it look natural and part of the environment. A tip to stop the kingfisher landing on the camera is to put a couple of handfuls of loose grass on top.

Wildlife photography is all about patience and planning, when it all goes well it's a fantastic feeling and a great way to wind down.

The kit I use:

[C30 Domehides](#)

[C40 Lens and Camera covers](#)

[C25 Camouflage chair](#)

[C38 Tripod leg sleeves](#)

[C39 Tripod mount cover](#)



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