

Review: The Ameristep Chair Blind
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Introduction

The Chair Blind from Ameristep is a relatively new type of blind option, offering a one person blind built around an integrated seat. My first introduction to the Chair Blind was last winter in South Carolina on a trip to take pictures of wintering waterfowl. Several of us had been invited to the South Carolina Waterfowl Association's private properties to take pictures of the ducks there, and fellow photographer Doug Gardner, the trip organizer, had obtained a few of these blinds for us to try out. We put them through the paces in some pretty rough conditions, and by the end of the trip I had ordered two of them for myself.

How it Works

The idea behind the blind is a retractable canopy that surrounds a folding camp style chair. The blind consists of camouflage fabric suspended over metal hoops for the roof. A zipper in the front allows access to the blind and the front opening is huge, offering you a very wide field of view. Coupled with the side windows, you have nearly a full 180 degrees of view.

Set up is extremely fast and easy. After taking the blind out of its bag, you just unhook the strap bundling up the blind. Open up the chair, and flip the blind canopy over the top of the chair. The crucial step is to slide two little metal sleeves that are on the blind supports down over the respective posts on the chair, which then holds the canopy in place. The blind can be set up in well under a minute, allowing you to get in and get settled in your spot in very little time.



The biggest challenge with this blind is figuring out how to get into it. What works for me is to set up my camera on the tripod at the height I will be shooting at. I then open up the front of the blind, flipping back the canopy so the chair is exposed. Turning so that my back is facing the blind, I cradle the camera and tripod to my chest, backing into the chair. Once seated, just flip the canopy back over and put your camera into place. This part takes a little practice getting comfortable with, but after a few tries it becomes second nature.

What I Really Like About It

Overall the blind is very well thought out. The chair is comfortable and durable, with nice armrests sporting cup holders. There are two big pockets on the sides of the blind, which are big enough to hold extenders, batteries, etc. The side windows are well situated to offer ventilation and visibility, and use magnets to secure them. This cuts down on the noise of opening them, a problem with Velcro or snap closures. One other trick I learned is that in a few places the metal supports that hold up the roof of the blind are exposed. These are perfect for attaching belt harness accessories to, such as ThinkTank or Lowepro pouches, keeping accessories organized and at hand.

I also like the portability of the blind. The first editions used a shoulder sling on the carrying bag; newer versions have been improved to include backpack straps. It is light enough that I don't mind packing it into the woods. The small footprint of the blind is also a nice feature, as sometimes you just don't have room to set up a larger blind.

At just over two feet wide, you can set this up practically anywhere.



Nits

As nice as the big front window is for offering a wide field of view, it does detract from your concealment. Using this blind I usually wear full camo for my head and torso to help. I also sometimes use a homemade flap I made for the front, which is very easy to put together. Just pick up some camo noseeum netting (many fabric stores carry this), and cut a square big enough to cover the opening. Then from the bottom, cut the fabric into 2 inch or so strips, stopping the cut a few inches from the top. You can use clothespins or small clamps to attach it to the blind, or stitch in a couple of magnets into the top edge which will hold it to the metal frame. Cutting the fabric into strips allows you to still have freedom of movement, while offering additional concealment, and the flexibility to push your camera out through the fabric wherever you want.

You will also want to set this blind up on fairly level ground, or stake it down if you are on a hill. Because of the way the canopy is attached to the back of the chair, this places all the weight at the back of the blind. If you are on a steep hill, have it set up without sitting in it, and don't have it staked, it can tip. Of course this is true with any chair, and is really not a problem if you are sitting in it as your weight will hold it in place.

The one potential problem I can see with the chair blind that it may not be suited to shorter people. This is due not so much to the height, but rather the position of the chair to the opening. When you sit back in the chair it sets you down a little low and for someone who is shorter, the front opening would be a little too high making it so that your camera lens would be resting on the blind material, and preventing you from angling the lens down. Not a problem if you are shooting up but for eye level or lower it could pose a problem for someone shorter than me. For me it works well (5'10"), and for anyone taller it should be perfect.



Wrap Up

Over the past year I have really put my Chair Blind through a workout, at one point spending nearly every day for a month in it. I have had it out in rain, wind, and submerged to seat level in mud and swamp water. So far it has performed great, allowing me to get close to a wide variety of wildlife. While it is not the answer for every concealment situation, I find I use this one more than all of the other blinds I own. For its ease of set up, portability, and low cost, it is a great choice when you just have to hide!



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