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# *A Texas Nature Kayaking Guide*

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## **Stealth Kayaking**

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Figure 1 This Greater Egret was easy to approach using stealth kayaking techniques.

Stealth kayaking involves things you do while trying to approach your prey, but it also involves things that you can do beforehand. Yes, that shy bird you want to approach is your prey even though you will leave her in her natural habitat. Here are a few things that you can do before heading out.

- Practice inserting your paddle blade into the water without creating a splash and removing it from the water without creating a splash. Then when approaching your prey, splash-less kayaking will be second nature.
- Learn to paddle without banging your paddle against the kayak, or if in a tandem against your companion's paddle.
- Learn a sculling stroke. This will propel your kayak with a minimum of paddle waving.
- Learn to pole your kayak while remaining seated.
- Learn what you really need in your kayak, and have it where you can easily reach it.

- Learn what you don't need in your kayak, and don't bring it.
- Learn the area where you will be kayaking. A scouting paddle is often appropriate.

Now that you are out stalking nature, here are a few more ideas that will help you get closer to the birds and animals you want to observe.

- Don't have anything flapping or rolling around in your kayak which may scare your prey.
- Wear your PFD. You may forget that hazards exist as you concentrate on your prey. I was once hit by 2-foot wave generated by a shrimp boat while drifting in 8" deep water photographing a sandpiper.
- Plan your approach, and if possible, let the wind drift you towards your prey.
- Paddle slow and easy.
- One kayak approaching the prey is less threatening than a herd of twenty kayaks. If a second kayak is to approach, it should approach from behind the first kayak, thus the prey has to watch only one of what it may consider a potential predator.
- Remain silent. Sound travels a long distance over water. Develop hand signals to direct other members of your group.



Figure 2 Obviously this wading bird does not consider us a threat.

- Don't wave your paddle around, scaring your prey.
- Don't head directly at your prey. This may be seen as a threat.

- Stop periodically during your approach to let your prey get used to you.
- Stay in your kayak. People standing up, or even crouching, are often seen as a greater threat than people sitting in kayaks.
- Learn when the prey is going to be in the area by studying tidal charts, weather forecasts, and sunrise and sunset information. Try to be there before the prey arrives so you can be part of the environment.
- While dogs make wonderful companions, seriously consider whether they will be as stealthy as you would like them to be when you are close to wildlife.
- Avoid screaming when a 12-foot-long alligator stops basking in the sun and heads towards your kayak as it heads for the safety of deep water. Screams can disturb lots of wildlife. If paddling where alligators are found, do not hug the bank, especially on blind curves. This is another way of saying: Be aware of all of your surroundings, not just your prey.

A few other helpful hints:

- If dolphins join you, resist the urge to reach out and pet them. I'm told it is against the law in Texas and carries a heavy fine.
- Take lots of photos. Your friends may never forgive you for getting that close to wildlife and not inviting them along.
- Take lots of photos. In that manner you can edit out 90% of them and just retain the masterpieces that your friends will drool over. The photo of the Greater Egret at the top of this guide was one of 8 photos I shot of him. The others were good; this one, in my estimation, was great.
- You may photograph wildlife from a solo kayak, or you may want to be in a tandem, letting someone else propel the kayak while you concentrate on photography.