

Arctic pics



- 1 The seal poised on the edge of an iceberg is about to plunge into the Arctic waters. Josh Harrison's photograph – one of almost 2,000 he took in this remote region – helped him reach the finals of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year. Now, the 29-year-old who says he is “pretty much hooked” on the Arctic, is holding his first major exhibition in Hull. “It is so pure and remote, and the light is always good,” said Josh, who runs a commercial photography and design business. “You could take the same landscape shot a few hundred times in a day and it would never be the same, it is always changing.”
- 2 The showing, at Hull Maritime Museum, features 20 of Josh's images. They are set alongside objects from the collection, to draw links with Hull's history of whaling in the region. Alongside the historical aspects, he hopes the showing will inspire others to visit this icy destination, and raise awareness of the changes now taking place in its ecosystem. “You can see the effect climate change is having,” Josh said.
- 3 “The first time I went up, there were a couple of maritime biologists studying the impact tourism was having up there. One thing they told us, which I found quite worrying, was that pesticides that were banned in the US in the Seventies, but are still used in other countries, have started getting into the ecosystem. The big predators, like the polar bears, get the build-up of these chemicals.”

- 4 Josh saved up for eight months to pay for his first trip to the Arctic in 2010. The holiday came about after previous trips to Iceland and Norway for this self-taught photographer. “It made sense to keep going further north,” he said. A former manager of the Skate Park in Drifffield, Josh began taking action photographs of the BMX bikers and skateboarders using the site. After getting requests to take more photographs, he decided to start his own business. Because of his interest in travel and photography he visited the US, Europe and India and he took a series of wildlife images across East Yorkshire. But the Arctic, to which he returned last year, made a particular impression.
- 5 During his 2010 trip, he came within 20ft of a group of polar bears. On his second trip he also saw seals, walruses and birdlife. It was during this trip that he captured the two images that reached the finals of this year’s Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. Alongside the image of the seal was a shot of hundreds of harp seals gathered on icebergs. “One morning, we woke up and there were hundreds of beluga whales as far as you could see,” Josh said. “There were all these little white humps popping up for miles around.”
- 6 He also visited the research town of Ny-Alesund, the site of the world’s most northerly post office, where scientists live alongside some of the region’s fiercest creatures. “You can’t leave the towns without carrying a weapon because of the polar bears,” Josh said. “The guides are always armed, though that is a last resort, as they tend to leave you alone. But then I think most of the places worth visiting involve some sort of risk”. He’s looking to return to the Arctic soon, and, in the future, would like to make the trip south to the Antarctic. Despite his affection for this northerly region, one thing he hasn’t acclimatized to is the Midnight Sun. “It’s particularly disorientating when you’re in a bar,” he said. “It feels like it’s mid-afternoon, until you look at your watch and realise it is 1 am.”

The Journal, 2017