



Heart Land

International photographer Rob Suisted discovers there's no place like home.

When Rob Suisted says he goes to extraordinary lengths to get a shot, you believe him. Because doing things by halves just isn't the Suisted way.

The 39-year-old photographer has been almost swept off Mt Cook during a storm, spent two weeks battling the elements – and losing extreme amounts of weight – in a remote area of Fiordland National Park, and has brushed up against death all over the globe.

Then there was the time, he says, warming to the topic, when he was photographing baby elephant seals

in South Georgia, a windswept island that lies between the Falkland Islands and Antarctica.

“One of the babies mistook me for its mother and tried to suckle my waders. It then hauled its 150kg frame onto me and fell asleep. I had to gently squeeze out from under it and back carefully away. That was an amazing experience.”

Last week, Suisted was eyeballing polar bears, walrus and beluga whales near the North Pole. This week, he's hovering down a latte in a Wellington cafe, after a two-month diet of instant coffee.

The scenic and wildlife photographer and Arctic guide has just arrived home from an expedition to Iceland, Greenland

and the far reaches of Canada where he was working as a lecturer and naturalist.

“It was an amazing experience to introduce others to these majestic creatures and to photograph them in their natural environment.”

For his seventh book, Suisted has cast the net a little closer to home – and to his heart. *Majestic New Zealand* (New Holland, \$59.99) is a “deeply personal” collection of photographs of New Zealand, representing what he loves most about this country.

“My previous books were accurate geographical representations of New Zealand, but this one features pictures from the heart. It's taken me more than



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10 years to compile enough quality images that I believe capture the real New Zealand.”

For example, there's the evocative shot of Northland's Hokianga Harbour crouching under a stormy sky, the isolated Kime Hut in the Tararuas, and a dolphin, frozen mid-leap above the Kaikoura waves.

Born in London to transient Kiwi parents, Suisted discovered photography when he won a Kodak toy camera in a childhood competition.

His passion for the outdoors was born in his teenage years when a friend introduced him to the joys of trapping and selling possum skins. Conservation jobs seemed a natural fit and Suisted found himself on the Department of Conservation's payroll for 12 years; he did everything from eradicating rats on Marlborough's Motuara Island to protecting the endangered New Zealand sea lion as DoC's national marine mammal adviser.

But his trigger finger was always active, and over the years he compiled a library of wilderness, landscape, natural history

ROB SUISTED



Opposite page: A lonely elephant seal pup snuggles up to Suisted in South Georgia. Top: Mt Cook and Lake Pukaki in winter. Above: Kime Hut, nestled under Field Peak on the Southern Main Range of the Tararua Ranges, at sunrise. Right: Suisted pilots a Zodiac in Neko Harbour, Antarctica.

and outdoor recreation images which now numbers around 50,000. His company, Nature's Pic Images, supplies everyone from Tourism New Zealand and postage-stamp companies to film-makers (his images were used in *The Lord of the Rings*) and international magazines.

Some of them, he admits, turn up in the oddest places: “I once met a Spanish guy in India who emailed me two days later to say he'd got on a tube train at Heathrow and sat down under one of my photos of Milford Sound.”

SHARON STEPHENSON

