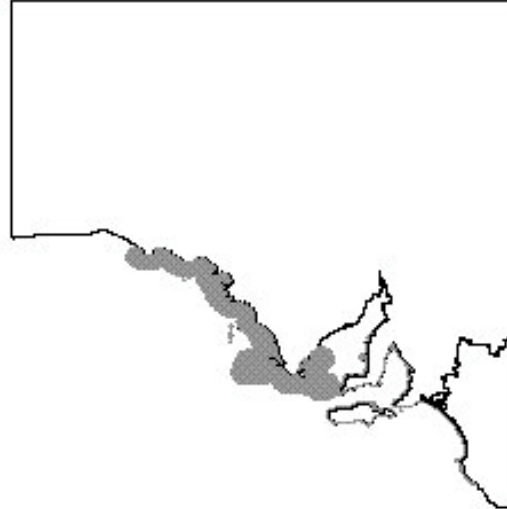


Biological Survey of the Offshore Islands (excluding Kangaroo Island)

Robinson, A., Canty, P., Mooney, P., and Rudduck, P. (1996). *South Australia's Offshore Islands*. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Australian Heritage Commission

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**Summary:**

Offshore islands are special places, and South Australia is fortunate in having more than 150 islands spread around its coastline. Some of the State's most remote islands are pristine wilderness areas; many of the larger islands are time-capsules of human influence on the Australian continent. During the most recent Ice Age, when sea-levels were lower, all of South Australia's islands were connected to the mainland and formed an important part of the hunting territories of the coastal Aboriginal people. Aboriginal tradition tells of a time when the seas rose to form our present-day islands, complete with their cargoes of plants and animals.

Pieter Nuyts - who, in 1627, was the first known European voyager to have reached the shores of South Australia - explored and named the islands of St Peter and St Francis, in what Matthew Flinders later named Nuyts Archipelago. Flinders also noted the vast concentrations of whales, fur-seals and sea-lions on and around the islands, and this brought lawless bands of tough sealers and whalers into these waters from the 1820s. European settlement of South Australia came later, and again the islands were important places where stock could be run and settlers could live secure from the pressures of the dingoes and displaced Aboriginal groups that made settlement of the South Australian mainland so difficult in those early years. The island settlers faced droughts, fluctuating commodity prices and spiralling transport costs, and most were forced to abandon their island homes. In the 1960s many of the islands were designated Fauna Conservation Reserves by the then Fisheries Department.

For more than 10 years National Park and Wildlife SA (NPWSA) biologists visited and studied the biology of our islands, and made many discoveries that reinforced the great conservation asset we have in these islands. Examples include: breeding colonies of cape barren geese, fascinating populations of black tiger snakes, tens of thousands of short-tailed shearwaters and the last known population in the world of the greater stick-nest rat.

Since the biological survey was completed some of the islands have been used for the reintroduction of mammal species that have been extinct on the mainland of South Australia for many years. This program, run by NPWSA, has resulted in thriving populations of brush-tailed bettongs, stick-nest rats and bilbies on a number of islands, with the exciting prospect of establishing these species in carefully selected areas of the mainland where effective fox, rabbit and feral cat control can be achieved. Properly managed island populations will be important sources of wild-adapted animals for future reintroduction programs.