



**Expedition to The Forgotten Islands
Inaugural Nuyts Archipelago Insect Survey
2nd – 5th November 2017**

Expedition Leaders – Alastair and Rose Dow

These remote, rarely visited islands are collectively known as Nuyts Archipelago, named by Captain Matthew Flinders in honour of Dutch adventurer Pieter Nuyts, who visited the islands in 1627.

The scientific aims of collecting insects in the Nuyts Archipelago were twofold. Firstly, to comprehensively document, for the first time, the nature and diversity of the insect fauna present; and secondly, to use the natural experiment that the islands provide to test some fundamental theories of island biogeography.

The Club also wanted to give our Members and opportunity to see and experience these remote and beautiful islands.

The science required placing insect traps on the mainland, and on three islands that differed in size and distance from the mainland, and then leaving them there for three days minimum. The islands we planned to visit and set traps were St Peter and Goat (about 15 km from Ceduna) and St Francis (about 55km from Ceduna).

We also planned to arm those Expeditioners who were interested with insect trapping nets, an idea which brought unexpected benefits to the collection effort.

Access to the islands was to be by EP Cruise's 50 foot aluminium powerboat, crewed by Rod and Simone Keogh and a chef/deckhand Brock.

Through our West Coast networks, we unearthed Garry Seidl, a local oyster farmer, and Craig Welbourne and Pia Richter, owners of Nunong Station, a private wildlife sanctuary. Visits to the Garry's oyster farm and Nunong comprised a land-based element of the program.



Arrival at St Francis



Preparing for insect collection



The Expedition Region

The Expedition was timed to coincide with the flowering of insect-attracting plants. This meant November. The Malaise Traps would be set to capture flying insects and mini pitfall traps for crawlers. Mulch would also be collected, along with the insects caught by the Expeditioners themselves.

West Coast locals know November as 'Blow-Vember'. There are strong prevailing winds from the south-east, and these produce a short, steep chop on top of the underlying swell, making boating wet and uncomfortable. But as the science was the driving purpose of the Expedition we rolled the dice with the dates, and had alternative land-based plans if the weather turned against us.

As it turned out the weather did shape the program, but not in ways that we'd predicted.

On Thursday 2nd the advance party left at 6.00AM in calm conditions for a big day of trap setting. We went directly to St Francis (a transit of about three hours) and encountered only moderate swell and wind. As well as setting traps we tape flagged a path between the Shearwater warrens to the original St Francis homestead. The wind and swell strengthened for the transit back to Goat and St Peter, but it was on the stern quarter of the boat and so we enjoyed some big scale surfing, with up to 23 knots on the speedo. We then set traps on Goat and St Peter.

Day 1. Friday 3rd – First attempt at landing on St Francis

By 6.15 AM the Expeditioners were descending a steep ladder from the jetty onto the boat for the transit to St Francis. There was a steady SE wind blowing. The journey up to and past the lee side of St Peter and Goat was quite wet, and by the time we cleared the protection of these islands the swell was gaining, and the conditions were deteriorating.

On the way to St Francis there is a zone between Lacy and Evans Islands where the sea is very confused, so the boat was slowed to try to improve the comfort of the passengers, but after another 15 minutes, and with some of the Expeditioners feeling sea sick, we turned back to Goat, and to think about how to land on St Francis on another day. It was a blow, but we were able to retrieve the Expedition by clearing the Goat and St Peter traps and hand netting, and we felt that the Expeditioners enjoyed their time on these beautiful islands. In effect we moved the program planned for Saturday to Friday.

In all 22 of the 24 expeditioners had at least one island experience during the Expedition.

On Friday evening we enjoyed a vibrant presentation on re-establishing endangered animals and dealing with introduced pest plants and animals by the charismatic local regional ecologist, Brett Backhouse. He stayed on as our dinner guest and obligingly moved from table to table to answer questions.

Day 2. Visit to and Oyster Farm and private wildlife sanctuary

The Expeditioners were able to luxuriate in bed until an 8AM departure in a convoy of hire cars and Expeditioners' cars to Denial Bay. There oyster farmer Garry Seidl hosted us. It is difficult to overstate how successful this visit was. His three hour presentation was superbly constructed and it was easy to see how he has become to be regarded as one the most innovative and forward thinking oyster farmers on the coast. The visit concluded with wine and oysters and a demonstration of the oyster sorting machine that he adapted from horticulture. Another highlight was seeing the evolution of oyster baskets from the primitive early versions to the national award-winning version that Garry has developed.

Nunong Station co-owner Craig Welbourne also joined us at Denial Bay and he led us in convoy to Nunong by the most direct route. We were met there by Pia Richter and she gave a short presentation on the history of Nunong, and what they are trying to achieve there as private wildlife sanctuary. The convoy continued through the property, until we stopped at the very expensive remains of a downed helicopter – incongruous in this environment. There we had lunch and then walked to the ruins of a nearby shepherd's hut.

The convoy continued to Lake McDonald, a huge 'salt lake' running parallel to the coast behind massive dunes. Pia and Craig briefly outlined the history of gypsum mining in the area. At the Pt Bell car park it was blowing hard onshore so most of the Expeditioners were content to chase insects with their nets as this had become a competitive sport, although no one would admit it.

We returned to Ceduna for the evening drinks and nibbles at 6.00PM. The scientists set up microscopes and part of the collection in our dining room, and we welcomed five guests, Garry, Deb and Josef Seidl (10 year old son of Garry and Deb and buddy entomologist), and Andrew Brooks and his partner Carmen. Andrew was another important local contact who initially directed us to Craig at Nunong and Garry Seidl. Andrew works in the Ceduna tourist office and helped us to provide an alternative program on Sunday for the Expeditioners who decided to stay in Ceduna. Phil Weinstein gave a presentation on the discoveries so far and presented a delighted Josef with a proper insect capture net.

Day 3. Second attempt at landing on St Francis

19 Expeditioners joined the boat at 6.15AM for the second attempt at St Francis. We were eager to get there, as we needed to retrieve the traps for reasons of science

and animal ethics. It is not overstating it to say that the St Francis collection was essential to achieving the scientific purposes of the Expedition.

We were also very keen to show the Expeditioners the beauty of the island and its constellation of smaller islands. There was a palpable sense of collective determination as we sallied forth into the vastness in our little boat. After Friday's trip the Expeditioners were better prepared for what to expect. The sun came out and the sea conditions were better than Friday with lighter winds and slightly less wind chop. We made good progress, and after a bit over two and a half hours we anchored in St Francis's sheltered Petrel Bay.

St Francis and its little archipelago set in the clear waters of the Southern Ocean is a rare and beautiful sight beheld by a fortunate few. Low tide and almost no surge made it easy to get on and off the little zodiac tender, and it was not long before we were collecting insects (200 specimens from this landing alone) while a small group hiked to the old homestead.

The successful transit to and landing on St Francis was the final element the collection effort, and leaders and scientists were immensely relieved and happy to have achieved this part of the plan.

Then the wind started to build and the surge on the beach increased and it was time to leave, and we surfed back to Ceduna in record time feeling not a little pleased with ourselves.

At 6.00pm the evening meal was served so that the flyers could catch the shuttle to the airport. The boat crew joined us for dinner and the drinks budget was given another hammering – seems to be a Waterhouse tradition.

The Expeditioners clearly enjoyed a packed, informative and exciting program, and the scientists were delighted with the pace and scale of the collection effort. Phil Weistein said that the amount collected during the two hours on St Francis would have taken two scientists a week.

We also had our share of luck. The local presenters were well prepared and engaging, and pitched their material appropriately. The little window of good weather on Sunday morning was the only opportunity to land on St Francis – we were truly blessed to have that chance.



Examining the collection



An Oyster Fest!