

## ISLET AND OFFSHORE UNIT

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There are 49 islets surrounding Mauritius out of which, 7 has been proclaimed as Nature Reserves and 8 as National Parks. Many of these islets have great potential for conservation, education and leisure if managed properly. Regular expeditions are carried out to the islets of conservation importance to carry out habitat restoration, to monitor the plants and animals and to control alien invasive species.

### List of islets surrounding Mauritius and Rodrigues

SN	Name	SN	Name
1.	<b>Serpent Island</b>	26.	<b>Ile Couba</b>
2.	<b>Round Island</b>	27.	<b>Ile aux Rats</b>
3.	<b>Pigeon Rock</b>	28.	<b>Ile de L'Est or Mangenie</b>
4.	<b>Flat Island</b>	29.	<b>Ile aux Cerfs</b>
5.	<b>Gabriel Island</b>	30.	<b>Ilot Flammants</b>
6.	<b>Gunner's Quoin</b>	31.	<b>Ile aux Oiseaux</b>
7.	<b>Ilot Matapan</b>	32.	<b>Ile aux Mariannes</b>
8.	<b>Ilot Bemache</b>	33.	<b>Rocher des Oiseaux</b>
9.	<b>Ile d'Ambre</b>	34.	<b>Ile aux Fous</b>
10.	<b>Ilot Fourmi</b>	35.	<b>Ilot Chat</b>
11.	<b>Ilot Aigrettes</b>	36.	<b>Ile aux Singes</b>
12.	<b>Islet at Pte de Flacq</b>	37.	<b>Islet near coast of War Department Land</b>
13.	<b>Islet at Pte de Flacq</b>	38.	<b>Mouchoir Rouge</b>
14.	<b>Lerique Islet</b>	39.	<b>Ile aux Fouquets</b>
15.	<b>Goyaves de Chine</b>	40.	<b>Ile aux Vacoas</b>
16.	<b>Bambaras Islet</b>	41.	<b>Ile de la Passe</b>
17.	<b>Ilot Grosse Bite</b>	42.	<b>Ile aux Aigrettes</b>
18.	<b>Islets opp. P.G. Bras D'Eau</b>	43.	<b>Ile des Deux Cocos</b>
19.	<b>Ilot Maino</b>	44.	<b>Ilot Brocus &amp; Lafond</b>
20.	<b>Ilot Vacoas</b>	45.	<b>Ilot Sancho</b>
21.	<b>Ilot de la Batterie</b>	46.	<b>Ilot Foumeaux</b>
22.	<b>Rocky Islet at Bras de Mer aux</b>	47.	<b>Ile aux Benitiers</b>
23.	<b>Ile aux Levrettes</b>	48.	<b>Ilot Malais</b>
24.	<b>Ilot Lievres</b>	49.	<b>Ilot Fortier</b>
25.	<b>Ile du Trou Vire</b>		

### National Park Islets

<b>Islet National Park</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
<a href="#">Pigeon Rock</a>	0.63
<a href="#">Ilot Vacoas</a>	1.36
<a href="#">Ile d' Ambre</a>	128
Ile aux Oiseaux	0.7
Ilot Fous	0.3
Ilot Fouquets	2.49
Ile aux Flamants	0.8
Rocher aux Oiseaux	0.1

### Nature Reserves

<b>Islet Nature Reserve</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
<a href="#">Serpent Island</a>	31.66
<a href="#">Round Island</a>	168.84
<a href="#">Flat Island</a>	253.26
<a href="#">Gabriel Island</a>	42.21
<a href="#">Gunners Quoin</a>	76
<a href="#">Ilot Mariannes</a>	4.05
<a href="#">Ile aux Aigrettes</a>	26

# Islets of Mauritius

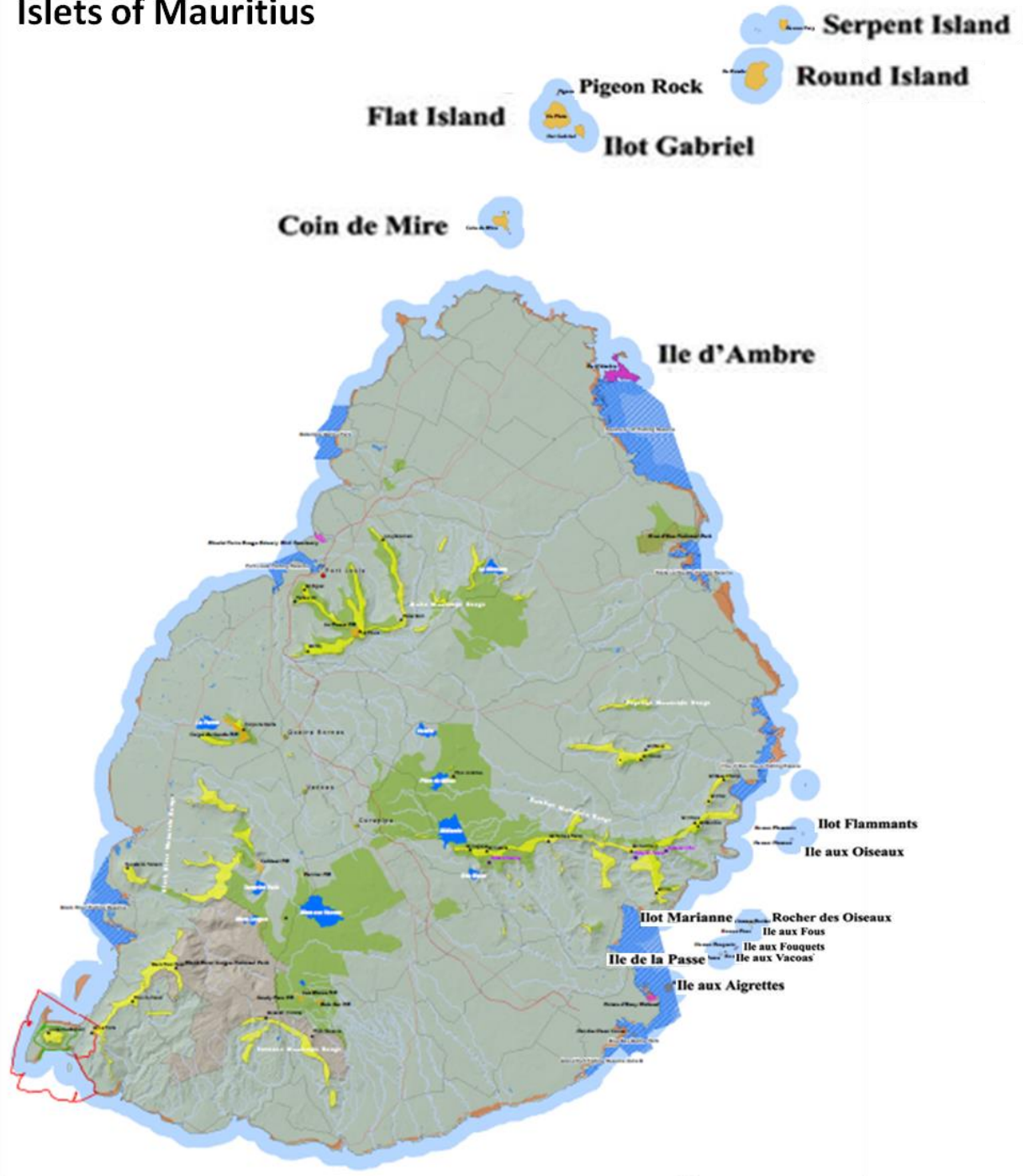


Figure 1: Islets of Mauritius (Click to enlarge)

## **The Northern Islets**

There are 6 northern islets which are very important for their biodiversity, especially seabirds (Pigeon Rock and Serpent Island), reptiles (Round Island and Flat Island), and remnant populations of coastal species and palm-rich forest (e.g. Round Island, Ilot Gabriel, Gunner's Quoin).

## **Round Island**

Round Island is of exceptional biological importance because:

1. It is the largest area, and the only relatively large island in the Mascarenes free of introduced mammals and reptiles. Following the eradication of goats in 1979 and rabbits in 1986 the palm-rich forest is coming back, with the help of restoration planting.
2. It is the largest area of native vegetation, and only relatively large island in the Mascarenes, free of major woody weed species.
3. It supports the last remnants of a palm rich forest once characteristic of the northern plains of Mauritius.
4. It is home to at least ten threatened native plant species such as Palmiste bouteille (*Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*), vacoas (*Pandanus vandemeerschii*) and Latanier bleu (*Latania loddigesii*), including nine taxa endemic to Mauritius, and is a potential habitat for many threatened plant species that could be introduced or reintroduced.
5. It is home to possibly eight taxa of native reptiles including six that are endangered: two geckos, two skinks and two primitive boa snakes. All of these taxa are endemic to the Mascarenes and five now occur only on Round Island.
6. It is the only known breeding ground in the Indian Ocean for the rare Round Island petrel and an important breeding site for three other species of seabird.

These biological values were under threat as a result of over 150 years of modification by introduced rabbits and goats. The eradication of goats in 1979 and rabbits in 1986 saved much of the remaining biota of Round Island from destruction and has facilitated the possibility of the restoration of the island to a condition more like that of the nineteenth century.

## **Serpent Island**

Serpent Island is an important seabird colony with almost no vegetation. This barren rock is home to sooty terns (*Sterna fuscata*), brown noddy (*Anous stolidus*) and lesser noddy (*Anous tenuirostris*) terns.



Figure 2: Round Island and Serpent Island

## **Flat Island, Ilot Gabriel & Pigeon Rock**

These three islets to the north of Mauritius also have important values for biodiversity, history and tourism.

**Flat Island Nature Reserve** is separated from Ilot Gabriel by a narrow lagoon rich in marine life. It is the largest of the northern islets (253ha). In spite of its degraded nature, the islet is

home to species of reptile unique to this island; it is used as a breeding site for sea birds, and also has remnant populations of some plant species that once formed part of the palm-rich forest. The islet was used a quarantine station during the 19th century and the remaining infrastructure is of historical and cultural interest. Today, the island is a popular day-trip destination for tourists to enjoy the quiet beaches and lagoon.

**Ilot Gabriel Nature Reserve** is a small island with coastal sand dune vegetation. Much of the island is covered by Baume de l'Ile Plate (*Psiadia arguta*), the only place where this plant grows.



Figure 3: Flat Island and Gabriel Island

**Pigeon Rock National Park** is a volcanic plug, rising vertically out of the sea and is a habitat to seabirds.



Figure 4: Pigeon rock

### **Gunner's Quoin**

Gunner's Quoin is shaped like a whale. The palm-rich forest is very degraded by prune malgache (*Flacourtia indica*), but it is important for several native species, including *Gagnebina pterocarpa* (*acacia indigène*), *Lomatophyllum tomentorii* (*mazambroun marron*), and *Dicliptera falcata* (last recorded in 1858, and thought extinct until rediscovered in 2005). The island is also used by seabirds for breeding.



Figure 5: Gunner's Quoin

## **Ile d'Ambre**

Situated to the north east of the mainland, Ile d'Ambre is a popular weekend destination for Mauritians. The island is badly degraded, although it still has some Latanier bleu (*Latania loddigesi*) and mangrove forests remaining.

## **The Mahebourg Bay Islets**

Situated to the south east of Mauritius, near to the town of Mahebourg, these islets contain important remnants of coastal ebony forest and buildings of historical importance dating back to the colonization of the country.



**The four islets are:**

- **Ile aux Vacoas**
- **Ile aux Mariannes**
- **Ile aux Fouquets**
- **Ile aux Aigrettes**

Despite human-induced degradation on the 26ha islet of Ile aux Aigrettes over the last 400 years, it has the best-preserved native vegetation cover amongst all the coralline islands of the Mascarenes and contains the last remaining patch of ebony-rich forest. The island is also a refuge for many rare plants, such as *Gastonia mauritiana* (bois de boeuf), *Diospyros egrettarum* (bois d'ébène), *Sideroxylon boutonianum*, and *Dracaena concinna* (bois chandelle).

Following declaration as a nature reserve in 1965, the island vegetation continued to degrade due to continual invasion by alien weeds (e.g. *Leucaena leucocephala* & *Flacourtia indica*). In 1985, the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (MWF) started restoration work on Ile aux Aigrettes. Following a grant from the Global Environment Facility (1996 - 2000), MWF was able to eradicate the rats and initiated full-scale restoration of the island's vegetation. The island reserve now has 20% of the world's population of pink pigeon (*Columba mayeri*). Successful restoration techniques have been developed, quantified, and implemented – 80% of the island's forests have been restored and now require only periodic weeding. The populations of free-ranging giant tortoises help in weed control. Moreover, a population of the critically endangered Mauritian Fody has been recently established on the island.



Figure 6: Ile aux Aigrettes

### **Ile aux Vacoas, Ile aux Mariannes & Ile aux Fouquets**

These three islets are important historically due to their strategic position in defending the bay of Mahebourg. The islets would also be ideal for restoration of coastal flora and fauna.

Ile de la Passe has been handed over to the Ministry of Arts and Culture since it has a historical importance and all the buildings on the island are being preserved.



Figure 7: Ile aux Fouquets



Figure 8: Ile aux Mariannes

### **Reptiles of Mauritius**

Of the 18 species of reptile that used to be found in Mauritius, only 13 remain, and 7 of these are restricted to offshore islets where they escaped extinction from rats.

Some of the reptiles are described below:

**Telfair's skink (*Leiolopisma telfairii*)**



**Figure 9: Telfair's Skink**

A large skink now found only on Round Island. This harmless skink is very inquisitive and eats anything, including its own young.

**Gunther's gecko (*Phelsuma guentheri*)**



**Figure 10: Gunther's Gecko**

A large gecko found only on Round Island. This shy gecko spends the day hiding on trunks of vacoas and latanier and is an important pollinator of the palm trees on the island. With sticky pads on its feet it can go anywhere.

**Keel-scaled boa (*Casarea dussumerii*)**



**Figure 11: Keel-scaled Boa**

A harmless brown snake only found on Round Island. The young are bright orange and easier to spot than the adults which lie camouflaged waiting for their prey of other lizards.

**Ornate day gecko (*Phelsuma ornata*)**



**Figure 12: Ornate Day Gecko**

A green gecko decorated with stripes and spots in red and blue. This species is widespread on the offshore islets and coastal areas of Mauritius. The gecko is an important pollinator of many of the native plants.



**Durell's Night gecko (*Nactus durrelli*)**



**Figure 13: Durell's Night Gecko**

A pale and small nocturnal gecko with huge eyes found on Round Island. Its closely related species are found on Gunner's Quoin, Serpent Island and Flat Island.

**Bouton's skink (*Cryptoblepharus boutonii*)**



**Figure 14: Bouton's Skink**

A tiny, fast moving skink that is found on the coast. This species is wide-spread across the western Indian Ocean.

**Orange-tailed skink (*Gongolymorphus* sp.)**



Figure 15: Orange-tailed Skink

A shy skink closely related to the Bojer's skink and only found on Flat Island. It has a dark orange tail and is most easy to spot after the rain.

## **Seabirds**

Another important group of birds are the seabirds that live out at sea, coming to land to breed. Most of the birds use the northern islets, although one the white-tailed tropic bird nests in the forest on the mainland.

The most important seabirds are:

### **Round Island Petrel (*Pterodroma arminjoniana*)**



Unique to Round Island, the Round Island Petrel has a light and a dark plumage. The bird has stiff wings which are well adapted to exploiting the air currents over the surface. It normally hunts by snatching food from the sea surface.

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*)**



The Wedge-tailed Shearwaters live on Round Island. Their feathers are a mixed of dark to light brown. They usually feed on fish, squid and crustaceans. Most of their diet consists of fish though.

**Red-tailed Tropic Bird (*Phaethon rubricauda*)**



The Red-Tailed tropicbirds have white feathers with a reddish-orange straight bill and black legs which resemble to those of the duck. Their elongated red tail distinguishes them from the White-Tailed tropicbird. The birds mostly feed on fish and squid.

**White-tailed Tropic Bird (*Phaethon lepturus*)**



The White-Tailed tropicbirds are also renowned for their greatly elongated tail. The bird has a white and black plumage. This slender and graceful bird has a robust, yet streamlined body with long, sharply-pointed wings. They typically feed on fish and squid.

**Sooty tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*)**



The Sooty Tern has black upperparts and white under parts with a black bill and black legs. They are recognized by their long tail and long wings. The bird feeds on small fish, crustaceans and squid.