

# AUSTRALIA'S WORLD HERITAGE PLACES

## HEARD & MCDONALD ISLANDS INFORMATION SHEET



### Quick Facts

- These subantarctic islands are approximately 4,000 kilometres south-west of Perth, Western Australia.
- Very few people have visited these islands since the first landing on Heard Island in 1855, which has helped keep the islands unspoiled.
- Heard Island has a volcano named Big Ben and this is Australia's highest mountain at 2,745 metres above sea level.
- Each of Australia's 17 World Heritage Places are also on Australia's National Heritage List.

### Why are Heard & McDonald Islands of World Heritage value

The Heard and McDonald Islands were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1997 for their natural values.

- **They help us understand major stages in how the earth was formed**  
Heard and McDonald Islands contain outstanding examples of physical and biological processes including active examples of plume volcanism, the only known continuously active volcano on a subantarctic island and fast flowing glaciers that change in response to temperature and precipitation.
- **They help us understand the natural development of plants, animals and ecosystems in an undisturbed environment**  
Heard and McDonald Islands are the only subantarctic islands free of introduced species. With little interference from humans, the islands provide a classic example of a subantarctic island group with low species diversity and large populations of certain species. The beaches are often crowded with seals and birds including penguins and this is considered one of the world's great wildlife sights. Four penguin species breed there, including King, Gentoo, Macaroni and Rockhopper penguins.

### Challenges and Management

Heard and McDonald Islands are managed by the Australian Antarctic Division (a division of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts) on behalf of the Director of National Parks.



**Australian Government**  
Department of the Environment,  
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Challenges	Management
Introduced species	Heard and McDonald Islands are located thousands of kilometres from the nearest permanent human settlement and as a result, remain relatively well protected from harmful activity. The islands are free of introduced predators, weeds and feral animals. Introduced species have the potential to arrive in equipment, clothing and footwear, containers, wood and vehicles. To keep the island pristine, anyone arriving onshore must wear clean footwear and clothing and be careful what they bring onto the island. It is a 'strict nature reserve', meaning that it is mostly used for environmental research and monitoring.
Sealing	After Heard Island was first sighted in 1853, many sealing gangs went to the island and killed elephant seals, fur seals and penguins (particularly King penguins) for their oil. The seal populations were almost wiped out. Since then seal numbers at Heard Island have increased, particularly the population of Antarctic fur seals.
Human activity	There are no established facilities for recreational visitors on Heard and McDonald Islands. The most recent activity at these islands has been land and sea research expeditions and human activity is confined to areas that can sustain the impact. Scientists study the permanent glaciers, the large colonies of wildlife, the plants and the largely untouched environments. Any human activity can impact on vegetation, wildlife and the environment. To help manage this, comprehensive restrictions and plans are in place to manage human visitation, building, waste management, quarantine, research and monitoring.

### Read more

[www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/heard-mcdonald/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/heard-mcdonald/index.html)



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