

Only three hours from Cape Town, De Hoop Nature Reserve is situated in the Overberg region near the southern tip of Africa. The reserve is approximately 36 000ha in size and one of the largest natural areas managed by CapeNature. It is a favourite destination for hikers, cyclists, bird watchers and, during the winter and early summer months, whale watchers. The Marine Protected Area, which extends three nautical miles (5km) out to sea, is one of the largest marine protected areas in Africa, providing a sanctuary for a vast and fascinating array of marine life.

## History

It is believed that many thousands of years ago, Stone Age people hunted game in the De Hoop area, followed by Late Stone Age hunter-gatherers who lived off the veld and coastal resources. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the nomadic Khoi or Khoekhoen inhabited most of the southern Cape and their middens can be found along the De Hoop coast.

The Overberg region was colonised in the early eighteenth century and over the next 100 years it became well known for merino sheep farming, horse and cattle breeding, and grain farming. The earliest registered owner in the De Hoop area was Pieter Lourens Cloete who established a successful Spanish horse stud operation on what was known as Hope Farm.

The Cape Provincial Administration bought the farms De Hoop in 1956 and Windhoek in 1957. De Hoop Nature Reserve was proclaimed in 1957 and subsequently enlarged by further acquisition of land. The reserve was initially utilized as an experimental wildlife farm where rare and endangered species, such as

bontebok and Cape mountain zebra, were bred for restocking reserves and sale to private landowners. Since the early 1970s, however, the primary objective of De Hoop has been to conserve natural ecosystems typical of the Western Cape coastal region. The Marine Protected Area was proclaimed in March 1986, contributing significantly to the conservation of this region's coastal marine resources.

## Climate

A typical Mediterranean climate prevails in the region - summers are warm and winters mild. Annual rainfall is about 380mm and August is usually the wettest month. Sea mists also occur. The most frequent summer winds are east, west and southeast, while westerly and southwesterly winds prevail in winter.

## Vegetation

De Hoop Nature Reserve forms part of the world's smallest and most threatened plant kingdom - the Cape Floral Kingdom. Fynbos is the dominant vegetation within this kingdom - largely confined to nutrient-poor soils in the winter rainfall areas of the Western Cape. Fynbos is adapted to fire and drought, and characterized by four growth forms:

- **proteas** - tall shrubs with large leaves
- **ericas** - heath-like shrubs
- **restios** - wiry, reed-like plants which are always present in fynbos
- **geophytes** - bulbs that store moisture in fleshy underground organs

De Hoop is important for the conservation of lowland fynbos as it contains the largest conserved area for this rare type.

The Bredasdorp/Agulhas and Infanta area, which De Hoop is a part of, has an estimated 1500 plant species of the approximately 9000 species found in the Cape Floristic Region. Of these 1500 species:

- **108 species** are rare or threatened
- **34 species** occur only on De Hoop Nature Reserve and nowhere else
- **14 species** were recently discovered and are still undescribed.

## Animals

De Hoop's many terrestrial habitats support a diversity of animal groups. The reserve has 86 mammal species, most notably the rare bontebok and Cape mountain zebra, as well as eland, grey rheebuck, baboon, yellow mongoose, caracal and the occasional leopard.

The marine environment is likewise home to a variety of life forms. Marine mammals such as dolphins and seals occur in the waters off the coast, and southern right whales calve and mate in the sheltered bays of De Hoop each year between May and December. At least 250 species of fish occur in the Marine Protected Area.

De Hoop is famous for its variety of resident and migratory bird species and more than 260 species have been recorded on the reserve. The De Hoop vlei attracts large numbers of water birds and the only remaining Western Cape breeding colony of the rare Cape vulture occurs at Potberg.

## Activities

Activities are diverse. Visitors may choose between mountain bike rides, scenic game drives and various day walks along the pristine coastline. Relax on the beach, or take a leisurely walk along the Vlei which is a birder's delight. The Klipspringer Trail will lead you to the lookout point of the only remaining breeding colony of the rare Cape Vulture. At night stargazers can experience the magnificent stars and constellations of the clear De Hoop night sky. There is also the world-renowned 5 day Whale Trail that requires advance booking.

The entire length of the De Hoop coast is a Marine Protected Area where fishing is not permitted and visitors may not disturb or remove marine organisms. Hence, you are likely to see the finest examples of inter-tidal ecosystems in the Western Cape when snorkeling in De Hoop's large, clear rock pools.

The Marine Protected Area encompasses the breeding grounds of the southern right whale. It is estimated that about 120 individual whales return to the waters of De Hoop every year to calve and mate. The sight of these massive mammals leaping out of the sea or simply wallowing in azure waters is definitely one of the highlights of a visit to De Hoop. The high dunes at Koppie Alleen offer an excellent vantage point for whale watching.



CapeNature

[www.capenature.co.za](http://www.capenature.co.za)

## Facilities

Tourism facilities (excluding the Whale Trail) are managed by De Hoop Collections, a Public Private Partner. De Hoop Collections has something for everyone at De Hoop, from families traveling on a tight budget to couples seeking a comfortable and affordable breakaway. There is a wide range of accommodation, ranging from camping and caravanning sites, to more affordable self-catering chalets to luxurious self-catering and five-star fully catered lodges.

**De Hoop Collection Enquiries & Bookings 028 542 1253**  
[www.dehoopcollection.com/accommodation](http://www.dehoopcollection.com/accommodation)

Potberg Environmental Education Centre encourages the development of learners to value the environment and provides opportunities and facilities for nature-orientated outdoor recreation and interpretation. Guided or self-guided environmental programmes for schools and research institutions are available.

De Hoop is open for day visitors between 07:00 and 18:00 (Fridays 19:00).

The nearest shop and fuel supply is at Ouplaas (Wydgeleë), 15km from the reserve. Firewood may be purchased at the office during office hours. No pets, firearms or fishing gear are allowed on the reserve.

## Access

De Hoop Nature Reserve is situated east of Bredasdorp, approximately 260km from Cape Town. The reserve may be approached from either Bredasdorp or Swellendam. The last 57km of either route is along gravel roads.

### DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY

All persons entering this conservation area and using its facilities, do so entirely at their own risk. The Western Cape Nature Conservation Board and/or its employees and/or agents and/or its successors in title shall not be liable for any damage, loss, theft, injury, accident or death suffered by any person, howsoever caused.

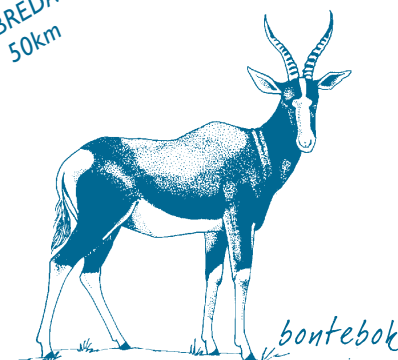
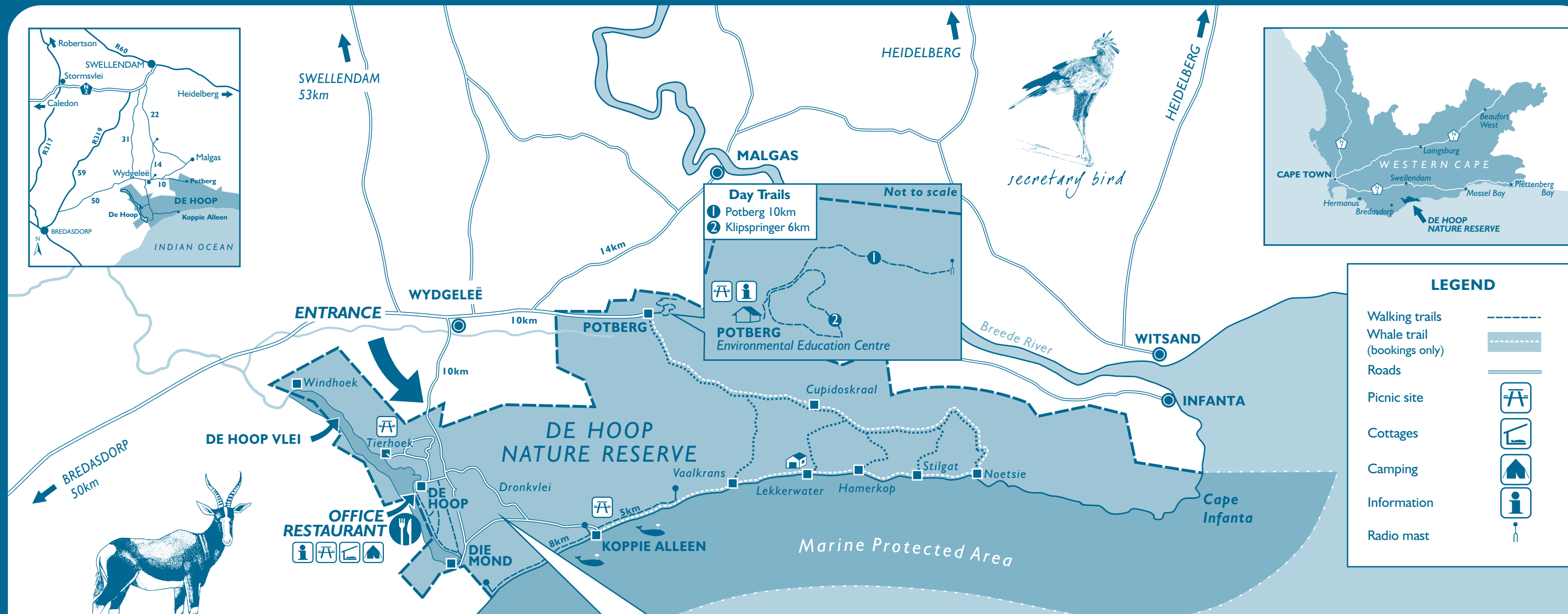
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**ENQUIRIES**  
Tel: 028 542 1114/7

**RESERVATIONS**  
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# De Hoop

NATURE RESERVE AND MARINE PROTECTED AREA

### LEGEND

- Walking trails
- Whale trail (bookings only)
- Roads
- Picnic site
- Cottages
- Camping
- Information
- Radio mast

