

Bontebok National Park is two and a half hours from Cape Town

Established in 1931 to protect the bontebok population, the Bontebok National Park is located in the Cape Floral Region in the Western Cape Province of South Africa.



With the Breede River flowing along its southern border and the Langeberg Mountains as a backdrop, the park offers spectacular scenery and plentiful flora and fauna. Although it is considered to be a species-specific national

park, the Bontebok National Park is home to a variety of other mammals, including the duiker, grey rhebok, Cape grysbok, Cape mountain zebra, African clawless otter and red hartebeest. It also boasts more than 200 bird species, with South Africa's national bird – the blue crane – being among them. Moreover, the park protects numerous species of fynbos, with the renosterveld islands hosting several species of plants unique to the area.



Of the two bontebok subspecies, the *Damaliscus pygargus pygargus*, commonly known simply as the bontebok, is found in the wild only in the Western Cape's Renosterveld and Fynbos areas, and is considered to be endangered and in need of protection. The other subspecies, *Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi*, commonly referred to as the blesbok, is found in the Highveld region of South Africa (parts of Gauteng, Limpopo, North West, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape, as well as most of the Free State).

As a medium-sized antelope, the bontebok stands at between 80 and 100 cm at the shoulder, weighing between 50 and 155 kg. Males are typically larger and more muscular than females, and both have lyre-shaped, ridged horns which can grow as long as 50 cm. Chocolate brown in color, bontebok have a broad white stripe from the tip of the nose to the forehead. They have a white underside and pure white patch around the tail. They usually gather in herds of less than 40 individuals, with mature males claiming and protecting their territories.

Hunting and encroachment of humans into their territory almost wiped out the bontebok population by the early 19th century. When the Bontebok National Park was founded, seventeen bontebok were moved into the area, where initially they suffered some setbacks before re-establishing the herd. Today, there are around 200 bontebok in the park, as this is the maximum number deemed suitable for the available space. Worldwide there are an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 individuals, all of which have their origins in the population at the Bontebok National Park.

Bontebok's birding list is as long as my arm but notable species include the Denham's (Stanley's) bustard, blue crane, spur-winged goose, southern black korhaan, water thick-knee and malachite and southern double collared sunbirds.

Bontebok National Park is located just two and a half hours from Cape Town, making it ideal for a weekend getaway.

The gate stays open until 7 pm in summer and 6 pm in winter, so one can make the drive after work on a Friday and a number of accommodation options are available in the park. The wooden bungalows are ultra cute and cosy, with some offering prime spots overlooking the river.