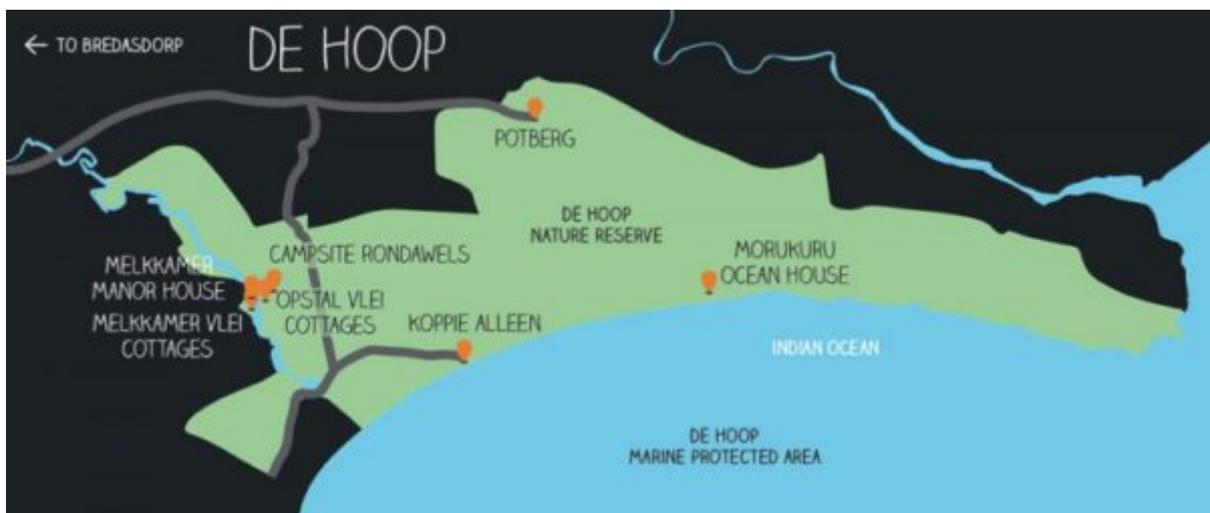


# De Hoop Nature Reserve is The Best

**We all have special places to which we return over again.**

De Hoop Nature Reserve is a nature reserve in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. It lies three hours from Cape Town in the Overberg region, near Cape Agulhas, the southern tip of Africa.



The De Hoop Nature Reserve is approximately 34 000 ha in size and one of the largest natural areas managed by Cape Nature Conservation. It is a favorite destination for hikers, cyclists, bird watchers and during the winter and early summer months, whale watchers.

The entire length of the De Hoop coast is a marine protected area, one of the largest in Africa. Fishing is not permitted in this area and visitors may not disturb or remove marine organisms. The marine protected area extends three nautical miles out to sea and at De Hoop you are likely to see the finest examples of inter-tidal ecosystems in the Western Cape. Snorkel ling in large, clear rock pools is one of the best

ways to appreciate the inter-tidal world at De Hoop.

The De Hoop Nature Reserve 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 water or simply wallowing in the azure waters is surely one of the highlights of a visit to De Hoop. The high dunes at Koppie Alleen are an excellent vantage point for whale watching. Whale season is between June and November every year with peak viewing months between August and September.

The adjacent De Hoop Marine Protected Area, which extends three nautical miles (5 km) out to sea, is one of the largest marine protected areas in Africa and provides a sanctuary for a vast and fascinating array of marine life. De Hoop Nature Reserve is situated east of Bredasdorp, approximately 260 km from Cape Town. The reserve may be approached from either Bredasdorp or Swellendam. The last 50 km of either route is along gravel roads.

A typical Mediterranean climate prevails in the region; summers are warm and winters mild. The annual rainfall is about 380 mm 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.

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 group and is largely confined to nutrient-poor soils in the winter rainfall areas of the Western Cape. It is adapted to fire and drought and is defined by four growth forms: proteas, ericas, restios and geophytes.

De Hoop Nature Reserve is important for the conservation of

lowland fynbos for it has the largest conserved area for this rare vegetation type. The Bredasdorp / Agulhas and Infanta area has an estimated 1500 plant species of the approximately 9 000 species found in the Cape Floristic Region. Of these 1 500 species: 108 species are rare or threatened, 34 species only occur on De Hoop Nature Reserve and nowhere else, 14 species were recently discovered and are still undescribed.

De Hoop's many terrestrial habitats support a diversity of animal groups. The marine environment is likewise home to a variety of life forms. The reserve has 86 mammal species. Most notable are the rare bontebok and Cape mountain zebra, as well as eland, grey rhebuck, baboon, yellow mongoose, caracal and the occasional leopard. 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 birdlife and more than 260 species have been recorded on the reserve. The De Hoop Vlei attracts large numbers of water birds. The only remaining breeding colony of the rare Cape vulture in the Western Cape occurs at Potberg.