



## **De Hoop of Hope**

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### **In Partnership with CapeNature**

**Report 1 of 3**



## Report 1

**Objective 1:** To what degree has the population changed since Charles Darwin's visit to the port, what are the reasons for the change, and what are the current trends (300 words)

The Bontebok (*Damaliscus pygargus pygargus*), with original ranges in the Western Cape is a subspecies of the *Damaliscus pygargus*. Speciation, largely as a result of climate change resulted into the evolution of the Bontebok, creating two subspecies, the Bontebok and Blesbok (*Damaliscus pygargus philipsi*). The Bontebok feeds and thrives in the Renosterveld vegetation, a vegetation type endemic to the Western Cape. Unlike the Blesbok, the Bontebok has a much smaller ecological range. Bontebok populations, once thriving within the Western Cape, provided a source of food for communities within the Western Cape at both commercial and subsistence scales. However, offtake of the existing stock was soon unsustainable within their natural ranges- driving them to near extinction.

At the brink of extinction, over two centuries ago, the Bontebok experienced a severe population bottleneck bringing the number to less than 20 individuals. Hunting pressures, disregard for the value of the species coupled with the expansion of farmlands threatened the natural habitats and ranging areas of the already population constrained Bontebok. A more recent and high impact threat, climate change, has escalated the risk of altering habitat structures and vegetation best suited for the survival of the Bontebok.

Bontebok has however had a significant conservation success story. By 1921, there were already about 121 individuals of the species within their ranges. Despite having much smaller ecological ranges, concerted efforts have been underway through game breeding efforts to protect, conserve and enhance species recovery. Over 20% of the Bontebok live and thrive on game ranches and lands privately managed. The Bontebok National Park was exclusively created for the conservation of the Bontebok populations and to enhance their recovery with 22 individuals introduced in 1939.

Despite the escalating pressures from urban sprawl, fragmentation, expanding agriculture, pollution and uncontrolled hunting over the past decades, recovery of the Bontebok populations has been on a trajectory of recovery. Collaborative management efforts, despite the core challenges have yielded a success story for this species, currently boasting of over 6,000 individuals.



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