



De Hoop of Hope
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In Partnership with CapeNature

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Report 2

Objective 2: Following the work of the local conservation partner, what conservation work is being undertaken to safeguard the selected animal or plant species, and how effective are these initiatives? Are the current conservation efforts sufficient? (300 words)

In De (w) Hoop Nature Reserve, the Bontebok population experienced a remarkable increase, reaching over 300 individuals by 2019. However, over the past five years, the population has undergone a fluctuating decline with a current population of about 160 individuals as of May, 2025. CapeNature, the organization I was attached to, responsible for conservation of the Bontebok in the reserve, has proposed several possible causes for this trend. Among the possible causes include prolonged droughts, increased competition for Renosterveld grazing lawns with other species such as ostriches, zebras, and elands, and, more recently, a suspected rise in parasite load that may have significantly impacted the population over the past year.

Another key concern that has been noted is the isolated nature of the De(W)Hoop and surrounding Bontebok populations, which increases the risk of inbreeding depression and threatens their long-term reproductive viability. While these factors remain unconfirmed, they provide a critical starting point for understanding population dynamics and guiding future conservation strategies.

As part of the conservation program, I collaborated with Dr. Marienne, an ecologist at CapeNature, on a Bontebok monitoring exercise. The activities we conducted aimed to:

1. Assess the physiological health and social structure of the existing population stock,
2. Determine the Bontebok's diurnal ranging patterns within the reserve, and
3. Collect and consolidate data to inform routine monitoring and targeted conservation interventions.

The monitoring activity involved both direct field observations and the collection of biological samples for laboratory analysis. Through direct observation, we recorded data on social grouping, population demographics, age estimations, and individual health assessments. To investigate parasite load and genetic composition, we also collected fresh Bontebok droppings for further analysis. For carcasses, we focused on determining preliminary causes of death from observable features.

Although these efforts are promising, limited baseline data remains a significant barrier to achieving the desired outcomes in Bontebok conservation. Strengthening data collection and long-term monitoring will be essential for reversing the current population decline and securing the future within and outside the reserve.



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