

1. De Hoop Vlei

Geographical Coordinates 34°27'S 20°20'E

Area 750ha

Location About 56km east-north-east of the town of Bredasdorp, in the south-west of Cape Province, along the southern Cape coast at the tip of the African continent, south-west Republic of South Africa.

Date of Ramsar Designation 13 March 1975.

Other International Designations None.

National Designations Provincial Nature Reserve^P (De Hoop, 40,000ha). Approximately 85% of De Hoop Vlei is included in De Hoop Nature Reserve; the remainder is privately owned.

Principal Features An 18km long coastal lake, averaging 0.5km wide, formed when coastal sand dunes blocked the course of the river Sout, redirecting it to the east. Salinity and water level (average depth 2m), varies seasonally. The presence of various estuarine organisms in the lake (e.g. *Tomichia ventricosa*) attest to its former connection with the sea. The shore of the lake is mostly devoid of emergent vegetation, with only a few scattered beds of *Phragmites australis*. The submergent macrophytes include extensive beds of *Potamogeton pectinatus* and *Chara stachymorpha*, while exposed mudflats are dominated by *Salicornia* sp. The site is an important wintering and staging area for water birds, including* *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (60), *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* (1,473), *P. minor* (1,715), *Plectropterus gambensis* (649), *Alopochen aegyptiacus* (2,166), *Tadorna cana* (896), *Anas undulata* (4,626), *A. smithii* (3,004), *Netta erythrophthalma brunnea* (784), *Oxyura maccoa* (895), *Ciconia nigra* (14), *Fulica cristata* (24,400) and *Sterna caspia* (11). (1a,2a,2b,2c,3a,3b,3c)

^{*}Figures refer to maximum day counts between May 1979 and April 1983.

Conservation Issues Virtually the entire catchment area of the lake (1,108km²) is under private ownership and has largely been converted to agricultural land. 85% of the site, (i.e. within the nature reserve), is State owned. There are plans to remove dykes which were once built along the lake edge. A major research programme has been embarked upon, the aim being to monitor the impact of Overberg Test Range on the ecology of the nature reserve and the surrounding area. The fish *Oreochromis mossambicus* has been introduced to the lake and is now numerous. The native aquatic turtle *Pelomedusa subrufa* was very common as recently as the 1960s, but may have become a rarity. An interpretation centre is located at the nature reserve.