

Let leopard Shiloweni have implants and new canines!

- **Target:** Veterinary Society of South Africa
- **Sponsored by:** Advocates of Shiloweni

Dear friends, we would like to share with you a very fascinating, but somewhat sad, story about a leopard, called Shiloweni. Not so long ago a South African company, Southern Implants, has been involved in a unique project, which involved almost every staff member of the company.

But lets start from the beginning...

In the first week of April 2009, Constant Hoogstad (Reserve manager of Karongwe Private Game Reserve) received a call from Gerrie Camacho from the National Leopard forum about a male leopard that had just been brought in and kept at Moholoholo Rehabilitation Centre. The leopard had been a resident in a densely populated residential area. Due to its habitat being so closely to people he became extremely relaxed and easy with human surroundings. Due to his relaxed nature he became a problem and officials decided to remove him from the area. Sightings around houses became more frequent and eventually it was decided to remove him to avoid a potentially dangerous situation. Desperate to save such a beautiful creature, Gerrie had taken the leopard to Moholoholo Rehabilitation Centre in the hope that a suitable home could be found for him. After spending a week there, an appropriate home had not been found yet. Although Karongwe already has a resident leopard population the decision was made to bring the male to Karongwe and give him a chance of a new life.

On 12th April, Dr. Peter Rodgers (Pro-Vet Wildlife Services) and Constant Hoogstad (Reserve Manager Karongwe Private Game Reserve) went to Moholoholo rehabilitation Centre and darted the leopard. While the leopard was under sedation a full examination was done. It was noticed that the leopard has broken off some of his teeth against the metal bars of the transporting cage, but it didn't seem serious at the time and no abscesses were seen. He was fitted with a satellite and VHF collar, meaning that both the National Leopard forum and Karongwe Wildlife Research team could keep track of his movements and monitor his behavior. He was brought to Karongwe, and monitored through the night as he recovered from the drug used. At 3am he was released in the middle of the reserve. The Karongwe Research Team spent 12 hour shifts with him through the night to observe him. Shiloweni has moved around in the southern section of the reserve, exploring his new home, and appeared to be extremely happy there. He made several kills, and gave rangers, guests and researchers the opportunity to view him. He was extremely relaxed after his arrival, and was content to go about his business regardless of his admirers.

After a month of roaming free on Karongwe, Shiloweni's kill frequency decreased and he started losing condition. His behavior also indicated that something was not right. Management then decided to sedate him so Dr. Peter Rodgers could examine him.

After the examination it was noticed that he had huge abscesses in his upper canines. There were two options left. Option 1: Find a dentist to help , Option 2: Put the animal down. Now of course a dentist was needed and not any dentist, we needed a dentist that would be willing to perform oral surgery on a 70 kg male leopard. Constant contacted Dr. Sonia van der Mescht from Tzaneen. Dr. van der Mescht grabbed the challenge with both hands and agreed to perform the procedure cost free. After Management and owners of Karongwe Game Reserve decided to give the leopard a chance and Dr. van der Mescht took on this huge challenge. The problem was far worse than everybody anticipated and removing the canines was not as easy as it would be on a human. The surgery took approximately 6 hours to remove the canines. The canines were about 6 cm into the jaw. The next problem the team was faced with was what to do next? Drs. Rodgers, van der Mescht and Karongwe Game Management decided to build the leopard a whole new set of canines making use of dental implants.

But where to get the implants of this size? Then the doctors contacted Southern Implants - a worldwide innovative leader in manufacturing dental implants with solid scientific and technical basis. Southern Implants management and engineers wanted to help and agreed to develop and manufacture special implants for Shiloweni at no charge. The dedication and professionalism of these employees truly deserves an admiration and great respect! Company engineers have designed a set of special implants for the leopard. These implants were manufactured by utilizing an existing design of angled implant Co-Axis BAT, with the 24 degree angulated platform. The only difference between a conventional human implant and the implants for Shiloweni was the magnification of exactly 3 times bigger than usual! For this purpose they ordered a specially commissioned thick titanium rod. All additional surgical and prosthetic components, such as drills, taps, screwdrivers, wrenches, cover screws, abutments, impression transfers, etc., were also designed and made specifically for the respective sizes of these implants. In total 16 (!) Co-axis implants were manufactured, since it was impossible to predict exactly what size will be most suitable. A team of Southern Implants engineers dedicated 3 weeks of work to this project and successfully completed this difficult and unusual task. All were eager to help an animal, an injury of which was caused by people in the first place ...

But, unfortunately, at that moment, when everything was ready to start the surgical procedure to give Shiloweni new strong teeth, one of the doctors of veterinary society of South Africa, Dr. Gerhard Steenkamp objected against the operation, threatening to report any doctor or vet who will do the implant placement procedure. His reasoning was that the animal must adapt in nature, with what he's got, without human intervention.

It's been awhile, but Shiloweni only partially adapted ... After all, leopard's powerful canines are not only necessary for hunting big game, but also for protection from other males. At the moment Shiloweni only hunts for small animals and birds and had a few fights with other males, which inflicted many injuries, impaired his health and diminished his confidence ... Shiloweni is still quite a young leopard, he is only 4-5 years old. Given the fact that leopards live till about 17-18 years of age, then we can say that his entire life is still ahead of him.

Veterinarians, scientists, game rangers, who work in the reserve, all employees of Southern Implants and thousands of ordinary people who have heard about this story, resent why we can not help the animal and give him a chance for better life. Let us support them!

This project is not yet closed, the implants are still there waiting for Shiloweni and we sincerely hope that with our voices we can make a difference and can help this beautiful creature!

Just imagine knowing that somewhere in South Africa resides the most beautiful and extraordinary leopard that got a second chance in fulfilled life with his titanium implants and teeth!