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Doctor flown in from South Africa to treat rescued big cats in Al Ain

- By Aftab Kazmi, Bureau Chief, Gulf News
- Image Credit: Aftab Kazmi/Gulf News
- A lion undergoing treatment for severely infected teeth. The lions are expected to recover quickly after the treatment.
They will be kept at the lions exhibits in the Al Ain wildlife park after their recovery.

Al Ain: A top veterinary dental surgeon was flown to the UAE to help remove infected teeth of two lions that were kept illegally at a home.

The extraction took more than an hour at Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort (AWPR) here Saturday. The lions were suffering from severe tooth infection for several weeks, and the AWPR had to fly in Dr Gerhard Steenkamp, a specialist doctor from South Africa.

The lions were seized from a house on March 16 in poor health and have been on antibiotics since then at the zoo, said Dr Arshed Haroon Toosy, manager of Veterinary Operations at the AWPR. He said the Ministry of Water and Environment had informed them about the presence of the lions at a home.

“The lions were confiscated in a special action taken with the help of police on a court order in March,” he said.

A health check at the AWPR had revealed the severe teeth infection. The lions were illegally smuggled into the country and their trader would cut their teeth and nails.

Exposed root canals

“This is their normal practice,” he said. The tooth-cutting exposed the root canals of the lions and it led to the infection, he said. The treatment of such big cats needs special equipment and expertise, Dr Toosy said.

Dr Steenkamp is an internationally renowned dental expert who has performed operations on many white lions, Bengal tigers and other big animals. Dr Steenkamp originally trained as a veterinary surgeon at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Faculty of the University of Pretoria in 1994. He has performed many such operations in various countries.


Dr Majid Al Qasimi, Assistant Associate Veterinary at the AWPR, said the lion is just a year and a half old and weighs about 130kg.

The female is younger and weighs about 95kg. “The couple had been very active at the zoo, but was suffering from toothache. They were, however, somehow able to chew their food but were constantly in pain,” he added.

The lions were first given anaesthesia through a dart in their cages and transferred to the AWPR’s internal clinic. The X-rays revealed the extent of the infection along with the damage to the jawbones.

“Unfortunately, the infection had spread deep down to the jawbone and I had no option but to remove the two teeth of the male lion,” said Dr Gerhard Steenkamp.

He spent many anxious moments with his hand buried inside the lion’s mouth and carefully extracted the five-inch long teeth. “The upper two infected teeth will be cured with medicines only,” he said. The female lion was also given similar treatment.



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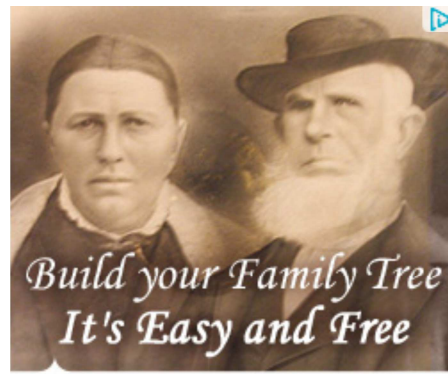
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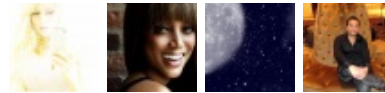
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