

# Dr Will Fowlds - Days as a Wildlife Vet

Tuesday, 24 April 2012

## Kariega Rhino update Tuesday 24 April

Yesterday, day 53, Thandi was magnificent. In spite of so many positive signs since her previous procedure on day 33, its impossible to tell whats really going on underneath the bed of scabs and granulating tissue until we actually get a hands-on assessment done.

We gathered at the Kariega gate knowing that she was less than two kilometres from us. As always, we talked through everyone tasks, the first one being to see if we could immobilise her out in the open to make all our jobs so much easier. Grant from Aprac once again did a magnificent job of steering her with the chopper while the drugs kicked on, and to my relief she went down on open ground yet again.

Dr Gerhard Steenkamp once again flew down from the Vet Faculty in Pretoria, courtesy of Supervet, to head up the surgical aspects of the procedure and we were assisted by groups of reserve staff, rangers, volunteers and film crew. Once her anaesthetic was stable, Dr Steenkamp assessed her wounds and to our absolute relief found her progress to be advancing very well. The best news is that there were no signs of infection or maggots and her face, as painful and tortured as it still looks, is progressing better than we expected it to.

A fantastic amount of new tissue has completely occupied the large holes hacked into the top of her skull where her frontal sinuses had been exposed. For the first time she no longer has holes through her head where they were not supposed to be. This is a significant milestone as we were not sure in the early days if we were going to be able to find a way to close up these gaping holes. In terms of restoring her dignity, this sort of progress gives us such a sense of relief of what is now possible.

Where there had been large slabs of exposed bone, she now only has three small areas left as well as an exposed ridge of bone. Dr Steenkamp operated on these areas and removed a substantial amount of dead bony tissue but noticeably less than he had done so previously. The new tissue bed that is being formed is still a long way from being the protective layer she requires, but it's a fine beginning for just under two months of recovery.



The attending ground team kept shifting her body position to keep her muscular circulation going while the rest of the team, worked for just over forty minutes on her. Twenty injections and the standard set of blood samples which Idexx will process for us again, and we all retreated to stand in silence behind the arrangement of vehicles parked nearby. For those that were seeing her for the first time, the outward appearance of her face is still a shocking sight to behold, probably in part because its such a graphic reminder of how disgusting the act of poaching is. But for those privileged to have witnessed her battle to stay alive and her determined journey towards recovery, we see so much more now than the shape of a tortured rhino. Underneath that proud outline, in spite of her violated face, we see a soul and a heart the size of a mountain.

What comes next is always the best part of my job, but Thandi's circumstances make her recovery from the anaesthetic drugs so much more moving and special. Within a few minutes after the anti-dote, she rose calmly to her feet. This is that breathtaking moment which confirms that she has come through, she is ok and she is out of danger. After weeks of concern for her internal circumstances, the apprehension of yet another procedure and its associated risks, there comes the confirmation that all is well. As we stood there in respectful silence, our profiles blending into those of the surrounding vehicles, the wind blowing gently through the trees, we watched her rise, and with her rose our spirits. I felt like we should be giving her a standing ovation. I wanted to run out from behind our cover and applaud her for the magnificent fighter that she is. I felt like shouting, "well done Thandi, you magnificent thing, you go you beautiful girl".

Posted by [Dr William Fowlds](#) at 4/24/2012



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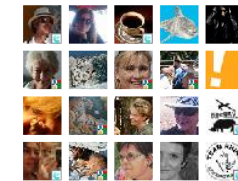
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Hooray for Thandi! Sending thoughts of healing and a full recovery from the United States!

Trey

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