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GENERAL

Elephant dentists off to Poland



A prominent zoo veterinarian from the Pretoria National Zoo is fast becoming a globetrotter.

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A prominent zoo veterinarian, Dr Adrian Tordiffe from the Pretoria National Zoo, is fast becoming a globetrotter - as a worldwide elephant dentist.

Dr Tordiffe and Dr Gerhard Steenkamp, also a renowned veterinarian specialising in animal dentistry, were invited to the Poznań Zoo in Poland to assist in an elephant tusk extraction.

The two veterinarians left for Poland on Tuesday and are expected back on Monday, if everything runs smoothly and no complications set in. On a previous occasion, Tordiffe had to attend to an elephant in China, which developed a similar problem to the one which he will be operating on in Poland.

The two vets were invited to Poland by Poznań Zoo staff after one of its male elephants fractured a tusk in its enclosure recently. Despite all efforts by the zoo's veterinary staff an infection has set in, in the fractured tusk. Drs Tordiffe and Steenkamp will undertake a three-hour operation on the five-ton elephant to remove the remaining pieces of tusk that could be causing the infection.

Tordiffe will be in charge of immobilising the animal. He is regarded as an expert in anaesthetising elephants in closed quarters. He has performed his unique technique on the national zoo's elephants and on elephants at a Chinese zoo.

During the operation, Steenkamp will check the immobilised elephant's other tusk as there is a possibility that a root canal may be necessary, but this can only be ascertained once he has inspected the tusk.

Both vets will be in Poland for a week to monitor the elephant for any possible complications following the operation. All veterinary equipment for the procedure will be supplied by the Poznań Zoo staff, however, Steenkamp insisted on using his own specialised dental equipment.

BBC 1, a British film crew, has also shown interest in this South African/Polish zoo collaboration and the operation will be filmed for a programme called Operation Wild.

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