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SA duo comes out smiling in jumbo op

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When the Poles were faced with a distressed patient, they turned to South Africa.



Ninio, an African bull elephant at the Poznan Zoo in Poland, undergoes heavy-duty dentistry at the hands of Dr Gerhard Steenkamp of the Pretoria Zoo

Photograph by: DR ADRIAN TORDIFFE

Dr Adrian Tordiffe and Dr Gerhard Steenkamp leapt to the patient's rescue in a surgical procedure that lasted more than three hours.

Their patient, a 5.2-ton African bull elephant named Ninio, fractured his tusk in 2009.

Poznan Zoo staff in Poland treated the affected area, but he damaged the tusk again last year and it became infected, causing pain and swelling to his face.

Tordiffe, the National Zoological Gardens' research veterinarian and expert in elephant anaesthesia, and Steenkamp, a veterinarian dentist, travelled to Poland twice to work on Ninio's troublesome tusk.

"The team initially managed to drain an abscess that had developed around the root of the elephant's left tusk and were also able to remove the core of the tusk. However, they did not have sufficient time to remove all the damaged and infected ivory as there was concern about the duration of the operation and the time that Ninio spent under anaesthesia," National Zoological Gardens spokesman Angeline Schwan said.

In his 14 years' experience, Steenkamp said the second operation to remove the tusk was his most challenging extraction as most of the equipment had to be specially developed for an elephant of this size.

Ninio recovered from the surgery and started eating within a few hours. He was up and about the next day.

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