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Thandi and Themba

Thandi and Themba, a White rhino cow and bull from the Eastern Cape were two of the very first survivors that made headlines over a year ago. Both were darted, their horns hacked off and they were left to die. The reserve management found them the next morning and immediately called in Dr Will Fowlds. He stabilised and treated both rhino for several weeks. Sadly, Themba died due to a leg injury that he sustained during the initial poaching incident.

Thandi survived, but with severe facial injuries. Over the last several months, Dr Gerhard Steenkamp and Dr Johan Marais have been involved in her treatment and she has made a remarkable recovery. She even received a skin graft, but unfortunately, she damaged her face again. At her last treatment, blood was collected from Thandi to determine if she is pregnant, as she has been seen mating with a bull she has been walking with for the last few months. Hopefully she is pregnant and we will soon see her running around with a calf at foot. What an exceptional sight that would be, after what she has been through!



Lady and Higgins

These two beautiful White rhino, a bull and cow, were attacked and their horns were brutally hacked off. Higgins' beautiful face was the worst of the two. In addition, Higgins lost approximately 80% of his eyesight as a result of the attack. For several months following the incident, he depended heavily on Lady to enable him to go about his daily routine and essentially to stay alive. She became his eyes and he followed Lady around, staying close behind her.

Dr Jana Pretorius called in the assistance of Dr Gerhard Steenkamp and Dr Johan Marais when she saw them for the first time. The two surgeons flew to Cape Town and proceeded to treat both Lady and Higgins the next day. Their faces have healed to a certain extent, but there were several complications with wound healing and abscess formation. A specialist also examined Higgins's eyes, and it seems that he has fortunately regained most of his eyesight.

Both Lady and Higgins were operated on. We received photos taken two weeks after these procedures were performed, and they seem to be recovering well. Gerhard and Johan will be visiting them again soon, to examine their wounds and perform the necessary treatments.

Lions Den and Dingle Dell

These two White rhino cows were initially treated and stabilised by the local veterinarian, Dr Peter Rogers after they were darted and their horns were removed. Their facial injuries were severe and Dr Rogers contacted Dr Gerhard Steenkamp and Dr Johan Marais to assist. The surgeons treated them for the first time on 10th September 2013, and have returned several times, with the assistance of Bernard and Adine Roode. The rhino have responded extremely well to the treatment and are currently doing very well.

These two animals were the first rhinos in the world to ever receive skin transplants. Transplants are done after the facial injuries have healed to such an extent that skin grafts may be performed, so that the nose has a chance of being covered by quality skin, as opposed to scar tissue.



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