

NEWS RELEASE

Orphaned rhino calf undergoes life-saving surgery at UP's Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital



Binti, the five-month-old orphaned white rhino calf, being brought into the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital (OVAH) for life-saving surgery. CREDIT: Jamie Traynor.

Pretoria - A five-month-old, 125kg orphaned white rhino calf from [The Rhino Orphanage](#) in Limpopo has successfully undergone life-saving surgery at the University of Pretoria's (UP) Faculty of Veterinary Science. The calf had been exhibiting signs of severe abdominal pain (colic) for two days and was urgently referred for treatment after refusing to drink from her milk bottle, signalling a potentially life-threatening condition.

Upon arrival at the faculty's [Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital \(OVAH\)](#), a team of veterinary experts immediately began working to diagnose and treat the calf. After sedation, ultrasound imaging revealed swollen and thickened loops of small intestine, indicating a serious gastrointestinal blockage. The veterinary

team quickly determined that immediate surgery was necessary to explore the calf's abdomen and identify the cause of her distress.

The surgery, an exploratory laparotomy, was performed by a skilled team of veterinary professionals, including a surgical team comprised of Dr Elza Hollenbach, Dr Yolandi Smit and Sister Adelle Rossouw; and an anaesthesiology team comprised of Dr Chris Blignaut and Sister Celine Lamprecht. Professor Katja Koeppel, a specialist wildlife veterinarian and expert in wildlife health, provided additional guidance.

"The team discovered that the calf was suffering from a colon impaction, a condition commonly seen in horses," Dr Hollenbach said. "The blockage in the large intestine was successfully removed, and the small intestine was decompressed. The surgical site was then carefully closed. The calf recovered well from anaesthesia and was soon alert and hungry."

Post-surgery, her recovery was closely managed by the veterinary team, with the assistance of Dr Graeme Piketh, who ensured the calf received the necessary IV fluids, antibiotics and pain relief. Within days, the calf began to show signs of improvement, including returning to her normal feeding schedule. Just six days after surgery, early in September, she was strong enough to return to The Rhino Orphanage, where she continues to thrive.

"This successful intervention not only saved the life of this young rhino calf but also represents a crucial step in the conservation of the critically endangered white rhino species," Dr Blignaut said. "As the calf matures, she will have the potential to contribute to the survival of her species by becoming a breeding female. Every life saved plays an important role in the ongoing effort to protect these majestic creatures."

"The veterinary team's prompt and coordinated response highlights the vital role of veterinary expertise and collaboration in wildlife conservation," Dr Smit added. "The Rhino Orphanage and the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Veterinary Science are committed to the well-being of orphaned rhinos and other wildlife in need of care."

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About The Rhino Orphanage

The Rhino Orphanage is a sanctuary dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and conservation of orphaned and injured rhinos in South Africa. The orphanage works closely with veterinary professionals and conservationists to ensure the long-term survival of rhino species, particularly the critically endangered white rhino.

>> **[Download pictures from the surgery here](#)**

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za