

Dentist operates on leopard after big cat fight with sister

HANTI OTTO

PRETORIA: Being involved in a cat fight can leave scars on a girl, even if you are a 12-year-old leopard.

Fortunately Zaza was not left at the mercy of nature and after an hour-and-a-half operation yesterday, which included polishing her teeth, she can show off her flashing grin again.

The leopard was involved in a fight with her sister on the game farm, Shayamanzi, near the Waterberg. Her right fang was broken in the process. A bite to her head, just in front of the ear, also damaged the nerve that controls the lip muscles.

Gerhard Steenkamp, of the dental clinic at University of Pretoria's faculty of veterinary science at Onderstepoort, said the nerve damage would take about six weeks to heal. The



OUT FOR THE COUNT: Zaza, the leopard, sleeps peacefully as Gerhard Steenkamp performs root canal work on her fang at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Clinic. *Picture: HERBERT MATIMBA*

leopard could still eat, she would just have a half-grin for a while.

"As fangs are too long to crown and can easily break

again, I did a root canal and sealed the tip of the tooth where it was broken. She will still be able to bite with it," he said.

The 50kg cat arrived at the faculty early yesterday morning. She had to be darted before the experts dared come close to her.

Owner Jannie Parsons said they have a leopard project on his game farm where the spotted cats are fitted with GPS collars to determine how many there are and their habits.

Zaza and her sister grew up on another farm in Musina. A few months ago the farm was sold and the cats had to find a new home.

"They were used to humans, so we could not release them into the wild. In addition, 12 is very old for leopards in the wild. So we decided to keep the girls in a camp until they die," Parsons explained.

"We also feared that Zaza's wounds could lead to severe infection. Therefore we intervened and helped," he said.