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White lion gets root canal surgery

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By Philip Maré

Dentists usually have no reason to fear patients who are five years old. But when the patient is a massive male white lion, there is reason to be a bit wary.

Dr Gerhard Steenkamp this week performed root canal surgery on a lion. The surgery, which took place at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital, lasted six hours. The lion had seriously damaged both of his canine teeth.

Steenkamp has worked on many lions in his career, and says he never tires of it.

"This is the pinnacle of my work. I love it. I have complete trust in my anaesthesiologist. This lion is out for the count."

Dr Brighton Dzikiti was the anaesthesiologist for the operation, and was very happy to be involved. "It is the beauty of the job," he says. "This is the biggest lion I have ever worked on."

The operation was a success and the lion returned with his owners to their game farm the same day.

Steenkamp said wild animals are not the only ones who need human help with their teeth.

With August and September marking dentistry month for animals, he says, owners should always make sure that their pets' teeth are in good condition.

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