

4 July 2007

SPOT-ON DAD



□ Above and bottom right: Trevor Oertel comforts Sahara after the cheetah was operated on at the University of Pretoria's faculty of veterinary science.

PICTURES: LIZA VAN DEVENTER

Big cats purr-fect after op at Tuks vet clinic

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Four Free State cheetahs came to Pretoria this week, but not to spy on the Bulls rugby players.

In fact, they did not even look vicious, only curious, as they were taken one by one into a theatre for surgery.

Sahara, Tosha, Sara and Getty are 11-month-old siblings, behaving like hyperactive domestic cats – but with much bigger teeth.

They travelled from Vrede to the Tuks faculty of veterinary science's animal hospital with their human dad, Trevor Oertel, to have growths removed.

Although they belong to the South African National Birds of Prey Centre and Wild Life Sanctuary, they live with Oertel.

He hand-raised them after their mother abandoned them. Being very tame, the cheetahs are now being used for educational programmes.

Yesterday Oertel sat with Sahara and Tosha in an enclosure at the faculty's hospital. Sara was still in theatre, and Getty waiting in another enclosure for her turn.

The animals seemed to recover quickly from the anaesthetics as they crawled on to Oertel's lap, competing for his attention and jealously growling if he dared to pet one more than the other.

Once in a while their ears would prick up as they heard a horse neighing in the distance.

"The four were inoculated when they were still cubs. Each one developed a growth on that

spot," Oertel said as he tried to avoid a rough tongue against his face.

He said his four "children" were a full-time job and were fed Blesbok meat and chicken.

"We tried giving them Blue Bull meat, but they don't eat junk food," Oertel joked as Sahara crawled in under his arm.

Veterinary surgeon Johan Marais said that when his patients arrived on Monday they used ultra sound to establish how deep and big the growths were. Yesterday he operated on the four cheetahs.

"The procedures went very well. I don't think the growths are malignant, but we will send them away for tests anyway," he said.

"They were very well-behaved patients."

