

Blind since birth, rhino calf can see after cataract operation

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PRETORIA: It may be one of those creatures that has survived since prehistoric times, but that does not mean modern technology can't be used to help a rhino.

Blinded by cataracts, probably since birth, a two-year-old white rhino calf from the Shambala Game Reserve in Vaalwater had not been able to do much more than sniff his mother and the grass he ate.

Yesterday the rhino patient at the University of Pretoria's veterinary faculty at Onderstepoort became only the second of its species to undergo a cataract operation in South Africa.

Hanru Strydom of the reserve said they realised the young bull calf had problems

seeing when he walked behind the mother instead of in front, as white rhinos do.

"He had changed his natural behaviour in order to smell, feel and hear his mother," he said.

Then, in October, the calf was separated from his mother during a fire and they realised the need to try to help restore his sight.

The operation took place in a padded room. After being anaesthetised, the rhino was hoisted on to the operating table.

Two veterinary ophthalmologists, Dr Izak Venter and Dr Anthony Goodhead, examined the rhino and performed the procedure in just 15 minutes.

"At first his vision will be blurry, but within a week he will be able to see fine," Venter said.



HEAVY DUTY: Veterinary ophthalmologist Dr Anthony Goodhead gets ready to operate on the white rhino from Vaalwater. *Picture: DAMARIS HELWIG*

