



Cataract op opens new world for rhino

BY HANTI OTTO

It may have survived since prehistoric times, but that doesn't mean modern technology can't be used to help a rhino.

Blinded by cataracts, probably since birth, the 2-year-old white rhino calf from the Shambala Game Reserve in Vaalwater, Limpopo, hadn't 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 Shambala 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 they needed to try to help restore his sight.

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 just fine," Venter said.

GOING SIGHTSEEING: Veterinary ophthalmologist Dr Izak Venter inspects the rhino ahead of its cataract operation yesterday.

PICTURE: DAMARIS HELWIG