



□ Dr Gerhard Steenkamp does a root canal on Zaza's right fang, which broke during a fight with her sister.

PICTURE: HERBERT MATIMBA

Vet to the rescue after cat fight

HANTI OTTO

Being involved in a cat fight can leave a girl scarred, even if she is a 12-year-old leopard.

Fortunately Zaza was not left at the mercy of nature and after an operation yesterday she can flash her grin again.

The leopard was involved in a fight with her sister on the game farm Shayamanzi, in the Waterberg.

Her right fang was broken in the process. Her sister also bit her on the head, damaging the nerve that controls the lip muscles.

Dr Gerhard Steenkamp, of the dental clinic at University of

Pretoria's faculty of veterinary science, said the nerve damage would take about six weeks to heal.

But it would not be problematic as Zaza would still be able to eat.

"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 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 could get close to her. The operation lasted an hour and a half. Even her teeth were polished.

Shayamanzi owner Jannie Parsons said he ran a leopard project on the game farm. The big cats are

fitted with GPS collars to keep track of them.

Zaza and her sister grew up on a farm in Musina. A few months ago the farm was sold and a new home had to be found for them.

"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 said.

"I felt that as they are on a game farm and not in their normal ecosystem, humans are responsible for them. We also feared that Zaza's wounds could lead to severe infection and we intervened and helped."