

Vasectomies for elephants

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THREE Pretoria University veterinarians are part of an international collaborative project to sterilise bull elephants to reduce overpopulation in areas of southern Africa.

The vets from the Faculty of Veterinary Science at Onderstepoort and their SA National Parks colleagues are working on the Disney Animal Programmes, which are seen as critical to the long-term success of elephant sterilisation and further developing southern African expertise.

These programmes are leading an international coalition of veterinarians, conservation groups, zoos, universities and private industries

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Procedures on eight bulls were carried out to reduce birth rates while maintaining normal hormone levels and behaviour in Swaziland's elephant population.

which, for the past five years, have performed laparoscopic vasectomy procedures on 20 bull elephants in a bid to reduce elephant birth rates in wildlife reserves while maintaining normal hormone levels and common social behaviour.

Their latest endeavour was to carry out laparoscopic vasectomies on eight bull elephants in Swazi-

land's big game parks.

Elephant overpopulation in southern Africa is a growing problem with devastating effects on natural habitat and other species.

"Elephant population management is one of the most critical conservation issues facing many areas of Africa," team member Dr Johan Marais said.

Elephant vasectomies have proven effective in reducing culling and helping support ecosystems. In the past three years the team has sterilised bulls at Welgevonden Wildlife Reserve, Songimvelo Wildlife Reserve and Pongola Reserve. All the elephants that have had this procedure have fully recovered.