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## Say awww! The dentist who travels around the world to fix ANIMALS' teeth... from deadly hippos to an adorable little hedgehog

- Dr Gerhard Steenkamp is one of the world's top vet dentists
- The South African operates on predators including lions and tigers
- His work has seen him travel to China, Egypt, UAE, and across Africa

By [Anthony Bond](#)

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Being a dentist is not always an easy job. Performing painful surgery on grumpy patients can test the patience - and nerves - of even the most experienced.

But when that patient is a six-tonne elephant needing root canal or a lion with toothache, it makes the task all the more trickier.

However, for Dr. Gerhard Steenkamp, it is all in a days work. The South African is one of the world's top vet dentists, operating on some of the wilds most ferocious predators.

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**Tough job:** Dr Gerhard Steenkamp is one of the world's top vet dentists, operating on some of the wild's most ferocious predators. He is pictured working on a hippopotamus' teeth in Pretoria



**Talented:** Dr Steenkamp operates on some of the wild's most ferocious predators. This



the South African dentist in surgery with a bear



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Global: Dr. Steenkamp's work has seen him travel to China, Egypt, UAE, and across Africa - performing around 500 surgeries a year. He is pictured operating on an injured elephant

### Dentist tackles some of the world's wildest patients



Dr Steenkamp's work has seen him travel to China, Egypt, the UAE, and across Africa - performing around 500 surgeries a year.

The dentist, from Pretoria, said: 'I've been really blessed in my career so far to work on a variety of animals.

'I've operated on everything from a small bat right up to a six tonne elephant.

'There's been plenty of carnivores too - lions, tigers, leopards, cheetahs.

'But the most hair raising experiences have been with the hippos and elephants.

'I've had elephants wake up on me in the middle of a surgery, and that can be because they are upset.





Difficult: As well as working on large, fierce predators, Dr Steenkamp works with some of the world's smallest. He is pictured operating on a hedgehog





**Tricky:** The most common complaints from his animal patients are fractures of teeth, infections and abscesses. He is pictured checking a dolphin's teeth



**Multi-talented:** The dentist performs a host of procedures including root canals, extracting teeth and scaling and polishing teeth. He can be seen operating on a cheetah

'The majority of the big animals like buffalo, hippo, rhino, elephants, they're just so big and enormous it can be tricky.

'Their size makes it difficult to work with them, you cannot just quickly move them around or turn them on their other side, it has to be meticulously planned beforehand.'

Dr Steenkamp, a trained dentist and maxillofacial surgeon, performs a host of procedures including root canals, extracting teeth and scaling and polishing teeth.

The most common complaints from his animal patients are fractures of teeth, infections and abscesses.







**Problem patients:** Dr Steenkamp checks the artificial tusks he attached to a walrus, left, and saws off a hippopotamus' tooth, right



**Grumpy:** A team attempt to roll a rhino after the dentist removes an infected horn in Pretoria





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**Hardened: After 15 years experience working with some of nature's most ferocious predators, there isn't much that fazes Dr. Steenkamp, including this elephant**

As well as an anaesthetic, Dr Steenkamp has developed a special set of tools to help him operate.

And after 15 years experience working with some of nature's most ferocious predators, there isn't much that fazes Dr Steenkamp - except grumpy hippos.

The father-of-two said: 'The first time I worked on a hippopotamus was at Pretoria Zoo - that was quite an interesting experience to say the least.

'Anaesthesia in these animals is quite difficult. This particular animal halfway through the procedure decided to wake up and get to his feet unexpectedly.

'In a confined space with a 1.8 tonne animal, it can be rather hair raising.'



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**Ferocious:** Although dentists often have to deal with grumpy patients, its doubtful many can be as hot-tempered as this tiger





**Surgery:** This elephant has some emergency repair work carried out on its teeth



**Fortunate:** Despite the wild nature of the majority of his patients, Dr, Steenkamp has largely avoided injury. A lion is pictured in the back of his hatch-back

Thankfully, despite the wild nature of the majority of his patients, Dr Steenkamp has largely avoided injury.

He added: 'I've been fortunate that often these animals are anaesthetised, so I'm not usually the first



person to come into contact with them when they are in pain and wide awake. This is when they are most capable of injuring people.

'We have had some difficult situations as some of these animals are very huge, so you need to keep your distance.



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Looking good: A leopard shows off his new teeth following work by Dr Steenkamp

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**Fascinated: Schoolchildren watch at the talented dentist operates on a cheetah**



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**Good work: Dr Steenkamp operates on a hippopotamus' teeth, right, and a cheetah, left**

'We try and make sure that everybody will be safe, including the animal, before, during and after the procedure. We spend a lot of time on safety and are very meticulous about that side of things.'

For Dr Steenkamp, the most satisfying part of the job is making a difference.

He said: 'I'm very blessed, I love my job. The amount of satisfaction I get out of working with these animals and being able to change their lives is great.'

'With a lot of cases where you can repair something, you can instantly see them wake up and eat again



free from pain. That is just really special to me.'



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**Qualified:** Dr Steenkamp is a trained dentist and maxillofacial surgeon



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**Sore:** Dr. Steenkamp says the most satisfying part of his job is making a difference. This



## hippopotamus gets some emergency work carried out on its teeth



Difficult: The dentist enjoys the satisfaction he gets from working with the animals and being able to change their lives. He can be seen with a team working on an elephant's teeth

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