

# MSU clinical veterinarians give 'king of beasts' royal treatment

By Maridith Walker Geuder

It was more than a typical day at the clinic, but Mississippi State veterinarians responded to the challenge of treating an out-of-the-ordinary 300-pound patient.

They immediately went into action when a 12-year-old lioness named Friday was brought into the Animal Health Center from Cedarhill Sanctuary in Caledonia.

"She was very sick," said Dr. Thomas Lenarduzzi, service chief and associate clinical professor of primary care, avian, exotics and wildlife at the university's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Friday is among nearly two dozen formerly abused or abandoned great cats—also including cougars and tigers—the 17-year-old animal sanctuary currently has in residence. Loss of appetite, nausea and licking were symptoms that told Lenarduzzi that Friday needed quick attention.

The veterinary team began work in the early afternoon, initially injecting the animal with anesthesia that allowed them to safely remove her from the transporting trailer. Once she was calmed, they could employ a gas anesthesia that allowed them to begin diagnosis.

"We have to follow the clinical symptoms," Lenarduzzi said, adding the team started by ruling out some immediate possibilities such as an obstruction in Friday's mouth. A series of tests followed, including an endoscopic examination of the esophagus and stomach, radiographs, ultrasounds and blood work.

Lenarduzzi said the doctors soon discovered a serious uterine infection that had leaked to the abdomen, causing peritonitis. Within a matter of hours, Friday was undergoing an ovariectomy.

"By 6 p.m. that day, a surgical team headed by Dr. Andy Shores had finished and she was in recovery," Lenarduzzi said. He said MSU veterinary students assisted in tasks such as starting intravenous fluids and monitoring anesthesia. Some were able to observe the surgery.

Just days after being on the operating table, Friday was walking, eating and "looking good," Lenarduzzi said.



Tom Thompson

CVM faculty, staff and students monitor lioness Friday's vital signs while she is under general anesthesia to facilitate extensive diagnostic procedures.

She continued to receive antibiotics and was released back to Cedarhill.

Established in 1987 by Kay McElroy, Cedarhill is a nonprofit sanctuary that rescues animals such as Friday. Once received, the animals are cared for throughout the remainder of their lives.

"We currently have 229 animals, many unadoptable," McElroy said. Included with the great cats are a range of animals such as dogs, domestic cats, coyotes and pot-bellied pigs. The sanctuary's focus is care of the animals, and it is not open to the public, she explained.

While Friday recuperated, McElroy was at MSU every day to visit and feed her. "I've had her since she was 4 months old," she said.

Lenarduzzi said MSU's College of Veterinary Medicine also has removed a foreign object from a cougar and performed orthopedic surgery on a tiger, both from Cedarhill. The clinical veterinarians also have worked with sea turtles, exotic birds such as parrots, and even guinea pigs from other Mississippi locations, he said.

"We don't treat venomous snakes or primates because of the risks associated with them," he explained, adding that cases such as Friday's are accepted only with the strictest precautions for the safety of faculty and assistants.

MSU's Animal Health Center, a part of the College of Veterinary Medicine, treats approximately 8,000 animals each year, most referred by veterinarians.