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A 'BEAR' OF A TOOTHACHE: VETERINARY DENTAL EXPERT EXTRACTS ABSCESED AND FRACTURED TEETH FROM 880-POUND POLAR BEAR AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM
29-year-old Boris resting comfortably following three-hour procedure

TACOMA, Wash. – If the tooth fairy visited polar bears, 29-year-old Boris at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium would be in for a very large payday. He's resting comfortably in his den this afternoon following a three-hour procedure this morning to extract an abscessed right maxillary canine and a fractured left maxillary canine.



Boris, a 29-year-old polar bear at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, gets a thorough checkup along with dental surgery this morning.



At left, Dr. Loïc Legendre, uses dental surgery tools during the extraction of a maxillary canine tooth on Boris, an 880-pound polar bear at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. The decayed, 3.5-inch-long tooth is shown below.



Dr. Loïc Legendre, a veterinary dental specialist, performed the oral surgery with the assistance of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium head veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf, associate veterinarian Dr. Allison Case, and a team of support staff.

Legendre also removed Boris' third maxillary left incisor.

Though the veterinarians had hoped the teeth might be saved, they were too far diseased and damaged for repair, Legendre said. Boris had undergone root canals in the past. It's not unusual for a polar bear of Boris' age to have decayed teeth, the dentist said.

While Boris was anesthetized, veterinarians also conducted a thorough physical exam which included taking radiographs and blood samples, Wolf said.

The procedure was a study in the extraordinary care and compassion of zoo staff members, who carefully planned the procedure for weeks and conducted a well-choreographed medical ballet in the operating suite, with each team member assigned a specific task to ensure Boris' comfort and well-being.

At 29, Boris is showing signs of age, but he's generally in good health, Wolf said. He is one of the oldest polar bears in North American zoos. Polar bears live an average of 15 to 18 years in the wild, according to Polar Bears International. They are listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Boris came to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in 2002 following his rescue from a traveling circus. He is one of three polar bears in the zoo's Arctic Tundra exhibit.

Boris received nerve blocks and pain relievers to ease his discomfort, Wolf said. And just like a human dental patient, he will need to eat soft food for a few days until his mouth heals



Dr. Allison Case performs an ultrasound on Boris abdomen, top. At left, staff members get measurements of the bear's huge paws.



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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).