

Major International Veterinary Operation for Seven Bornean Sun Bears

Thursday 3 September, 2026

[Sabah, Malaysia, 3rd September 2026] Getting seven Bornean sun bears to the dentist is no mean feat - a challenge recently faced by animal care staff at [Lok Kawi Wildlife Park](#) in Sabah, Malaysia.

Diego, the largest male of the group weighing over 95 kg, required an eight-person crew and a heavy-duty stretcher just to reach the temporary operating theatre. All seven sun bears including May May, Teng Teng, Anton, Jirran, Ron, Obot and Diego underwent long-awaited health checks organised in collaboration with [international animal welfare charity, Wild Welfare](#). Specialist veterinarians from Germany were flown in to deliver full diagnostic checks and essential dental extractions to help protect the bears' long-term health and well-being.

Wild Welfare's team has worked closely for many years with Lok Kawi animal keepers and management, developing a trusted relationship to improve care and welfare through collaborative support, targeted interventions and welfare science up-skilling. "During our ongoing welfare assessments in collaboration with the Lok Kawi Wildlife Park team, our staff noticed signs of concern regarding the bears' health," explained Simon Marsh, Director at Wild Welfare. "After observing their behavior and discussing with the animal care team we identified some concerning health issues that would require closer inspection so we suggested taking proactive steps to address these concerns," Simon added.

Supported by the Sabah Wildlife Department, experts from German organisations [CENZOO](#) and [Wildtierpraxis Maltzan](#) joined park staff to meticulously plan and carry out the multi-day surgery.

For Ron, the park's 17-year-old male sun bear, it quickly became apparent to the team why he was unusually picky about the food he ate. Weighing 41 kg, the gentle bear had been living with four highly infected molars and two broken canines.

Obot, a clever 23-year-old female, who especially loves digging, was found to be suffering from the worst dental damage of the group. Despite her active nature, the surgeons found a fistula in her lower jaw where an infected tooth had eroded all the way through the bone. Her extensive dental damage required eight teeth extractions.

For Diego, his dental health was surprisingly good; however, the team found notable signs of aging in his joints and muscles. Park care staff have been advised on making suitable alterations to Diego's enclosure that take into account his changing needs to help provide greater comfort for the rest of his life.

In total, the team extracted over 30 problematic teeth, treated facial infections, and conducted ultrasounds revealing hidden discomforts that routine visual examination could not diagnose.

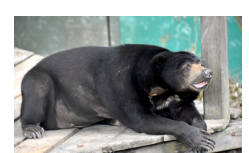
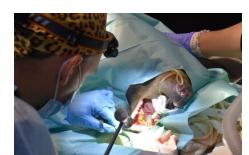
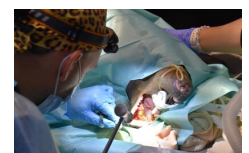
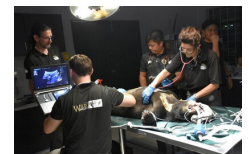
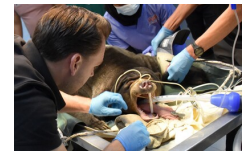
After resting in their dens for a few hours, all seven bears began to slowly awaken. Diego could be heard snoozing softly in the shade, while Obot rested comfortably on a raised wooden platform. After the team left, it was reported that the group of bears were much more relaxed in their enclosure, sleeping peacefully together and showing signs of relief from previous pain.

This life-changing medical intervention was made possible through the kind financial support of [The Big Cat Sanctuary](#), [Hertfordshire Zoo](#) and the Marjorie Coote Animal Charity Trust. [The Winton Foundation for the Welfare of Bears](#) also provided crucial funding to specifically support the vital veterinary procedures.

Following a thorough debrief and review of the surgical outcomes, Lok Kawi Wildlife Park formally agreed to implement a recommended three-month dietary transition for the bears. This initiative will replace high-sugar fruits in their diets with high-fibre vegetables and leafy branches for foraging. This commitment represents the park's next step in supporting preventive healthcare and working with Wild Welfare to continue sustainable welfare improvements.

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