



Lladmo's Toothache

So what do you do when you have a 600-pound bear with a toothache? This is exactly what we asked ourselves when one of our veterinarians, Dr. Yael Bar-Shalom, noticed that Lladmo (who came to us from the Payson Zoo some years ago when it closed) was exhibiting pain when he was eating. There is only one answer. You call Dr. Chris Visser at the Aid Animal Clinic in Scottsdale.

Dr. Visser is a veterinarian whose practice specializes in animal dentistry. Dr. Bar-Shalom contacted Dr. Visser and asked him if he would be willing to examine and treat a 600-pound bear. We were delighted when Dr. Visser agreed. He and Dr. Bar-Shalom started planning the project, as this would not be an easy task. They couldn't take a 600-pound bear to the dentist, so they'd have to bring the dental hospital to him!

Dr. Visser arranged for Custom X-ray Imaging Services, Inc. to bring a mobile x-ray machine to Southwest Wildlife. He also arranged for his associate, Dr. Curt Coffman, to assist, along with their dental tech, Wendy Bauer.

Dr. Bar-Shalom's part was to handle the anesthesia, which is no small feat on a 600-pound bear. For this task, she enlisted the assistance of Dr. Cliff Crooks and vet tech Beth Lagimonier, both of Sonora Veterinary Specialists. There is always a risk when you sedate an animal—even more so when you are sedating an animal this big and this old (Lladmo is 24 years old!).

That morning we all assembled in the hospital to work out our plan of action—and a backup plan in case the first one failed! The drugs were mixed and the syringe pole was loaded. We gathered up our gear and headed for the bear pen. Lladmo had been confined to his den for the night, so we tried to coax him out with fresh salmon. With some persuasion, Lladmo finally came out. But when the doctor went to jab him, he moved and she missed. Now we had an angry and very suspicious bear. This was not good.

Still, a piece of fresh salmon is a pretty tempting treat for a bear. After an hour, as our team patiently waited, he decided he couldn't resist that salmon and emerged again to try to get it. This time Dr. Bar-Shalom was able to hit him. That really made him mad!! He let out an angry roar and ran back into his den.

We waited for the drug to take effect. Thirty minutes later he was looking a little drowsy, but he was not asleep. She loaded up and tried again. Another half hour, and he was still too aware of what was going on. However, since he was quite groggy, we were able to sedate him the rest of the way with gas. Soon he was snoring away.

The team quickly made their move, bringing in truckloads of equipment to set up a dental hospital right there in Lladmo's pen. He was prepped for surgery and given an IV to provide him with fluids and medication. The veterinarians positioned him for the procedure and placed an intertrachial tube to administer anesthesia and oxygen.

Wendy took dental x-rays of Lladmo and found the problem. Lladmo needed a root canal! Dr. Visser began immediately and worked quickly. Because Lladmo is such an old bear, it would be dangerous for him to be kept under anesthesia more than an hour. In just one hour this very efficient team had accomplished its mission. The root canal was completed! After removing all the equipment and most of the people, Lladmo was given a drug to reverse the drugs he had been given to put him to sleep.

We are very grateful to everyone for their time and hard work. Thanks to the extraordinary effort of the entire team, Lladmo is doing great now. He was a bit cranky for a few days, but he has finally forgiven us. However, the next time he's offered salmon, it may take a lot of coaxing to get him out of his den.