Walt Disney World News

PR – Elephant Vasectomy

LAKE BUENA VISTA,Fla., Oct. 5, 2006 - Veterinarians from Disney's Animal Programs led a coalition of experts in an effort to investigate a new method of controlling the growing elephant population in areas of Southern Africa. Their work has resulted in the creation of a new surgical procedure and device that effectively sterilizes male elephants with little trauma or side effects.

Elephant overpopulation in wildlife parks and reserves in

Africa is a growing problem and can have devastating effects on the natural landscape and other species. Because no proven method of permanent contraception currently exists for elephants, wildlife officials in many countries are considering killing herds of elephants in order to control the population growth. In July 2004, this team performed the first ever sterilization of free ranging female elephants. In 2005, this group began its work with bull elephants and started developing laparoscopic vasectomy techniques for sterilizing males in the wild.

"The Elephant over population problem in

Southern Africa is a major concern because of habitat destruction. This has lead wildlife officials in the area to consider the possibility of killing large numbers of elephants to deal with the problem," said Dr. Mark Stetter, Director of Veterinary Services and Disney's Animal Programs and leading this effort. "It is important for us to utilize the technology and tools available to address conservation and wildlife issues. As an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) we are committed to finding or creating innovative solutions to issues facing all wildlife."

In July 2006, a team of experts from Disney's Animal Programs,

ColoradoStateUniversity, The Zoological Society of San Diego and Catchco Africa performed complete laparoscopic vasectomies on four male elephants at the Welgevonden Game Reserve inSouth Africa. This project is part of a pilot study into the feasibility of using this technique as a population control method in wild elephant herds. Elephants are unique among most mammals in that their testes are next to the kidneys and require abdominal surgery to perform a vasectomy, making the traditional procedure nearly impossible to do in the wild.

This new procedure involves state of the art medical equipment specifically developed and donated for this project and scaled from human to elephant proportions. The elephant laparoscopic equipment was built in

Germany by the Karl Storz Company. Laparoscopic surgery allows the surgeon to view on a monitor the internal organs and use long thin instruments to perform the surgery. With this type of surgery, there is less chance for infection, the procedure time is faster and involves less post-operative discomfort.

Currently, wildlife scientists and rangers are using telemetry tracking collars to closely monitor the animals and ensure there are no post-operative complications.   All four elephants have recovered and have shown no long term negative effects from the procedure.

This is an international collaborative project that brings together conservations groups, universities and private industry to address this complex problem. These organizations include: Disney's Animal Programs,

ColoradoStateUniversity, the Zoological Society of San Diego, the Karl Storz Company, Catchco Africa Specialized Wildlife Capture and the Welgevonden Game Reserve.