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MU surgeons help heal a tiger

By ALAN BAVLEY
The Kansas City Star

Sully, a Bengal tiger that had been abused and malnourished as a cub, underwent six hours of surgery Wednesday at the University of Missouri-Columbia to correct a badly deformed right forelimb.

In what is believed to be a one-of-a-kind operation, three MU veterinary surgeons cut and reoriented the bones in Sully's leg so that he could walk without limping.

"Our goal was to get his shoulder and forearm in alignment so his paw could hit (the ground) flat," said surgeon Jimi Cook.

Cook said Sully had been malnourished and suffered from a condition comparable to rickets that had caused his bones to become deformed.

Sully was one of a group of five tiger cubs that had traveled the fair and carnival circuit. People would pay as much as \$25 to have their picture taken with the cubs. When the cubs became too large to be used legally, they were sold to a handler in New Orleans who kept the animals in his car and displayed them in parking lots. Two of the cubs died under his care.

In 2004, the three surviving cubs were rescued by the local chapter of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The tigers were sent to The Wild Animal Sanctuary near Denver, which cares for large carnivores. As the tigers continued to grow, their bones recovered, except for Sully's forelimb.

Without the surgery, Sully would probably have been put to sleep within a year, Cook said.

Sully was driven home Wednesday night and was recovering nicely today, said sanctuary executive director Pat Craig.

"He is lying in the sun in a recovery pen," Craig said. "He checked it out a little before sunrise and he went back to sleep."



With Sully under anesthesia, Drs. Jimi Cook and Derek Fox examined the tiger's right leg and discussed surgery plans.