

Faculty vets rescue female black-footed cat and her kittens with cesarean section

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The black-footed cat (*Felis nigripes*) is one of South Africa's smallest and most enigmatic wild cat species. Their numbers, both in the wild and in captivity are rapidly declining and they are currently listed as vulnerable in the IUCN Red List (2006) and are also listed under Appendix I by the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES).

Athena, the female black footed cat, was brought to the Lory Park Zoo and Owl Sanctuary as a 6-months old kitten. Found during harvest season on a farm near Lichtenburg, she was paired with a male and became pregnant. This was her first litter. Black-footed cat gestation is similar to a domestic cat (63 days). She was monitored throughout her pregnancy as it was her first litter and she was very large.

On Monday, 19 August she was brought to the Faculty's Veterinary Academic Hospital (OVAH) with a history of lethargy and depression. According to the manager of Lory Park Zoo, Kara Heynis she was 5 days overdue. Ultrasound of the female showed two healthy foetuses and one where no heart beat could be seen. Radiographs of the female confirmed three kittens *in utero*. As the female was very lethargic and the foetus very large and overdue, Dr Katja Koepfel, wildlife vet in the Faculty, decided to perform a caesarean section.

Three kittens, two female and one male were removed from the uterus. The male was presenting without breathing or audible heartbeat but Dr Dorianne Elliot, head of the Bird and Exotic Animal Clinic managed to successfully resuscitate him. All three kittens are now being hand-reared by Kara Heynis and are putting on weight. They will become part of the captive black-footed cat breeding program to combat the decline of this species. Mom Athena also made a great recovery and is chasing anyone out of her enclosure that comes too close, which is normal behaviour for a black footed cat. [Read it on twitter here.](#)



Dr Katja Koepfel with one of the kittens after all three were successfully delivered.

The three kittens, safe and sound after their ordeal



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