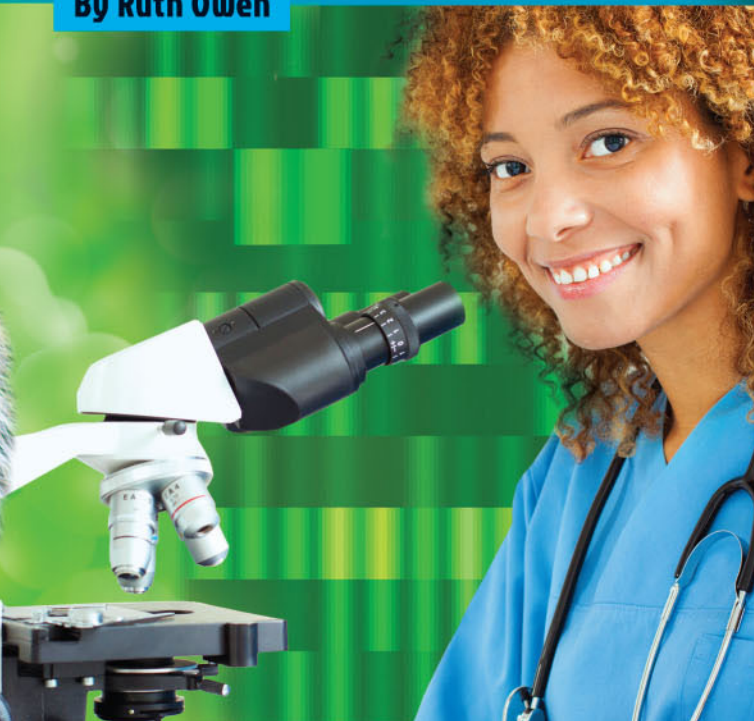




**Get to Work  
with  
Science  
and  
Technology**

# The Wild World of a **ZOO VET**

By Ruth Owen



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The Wild World  
of a  
**Zoo Vet**

**by Ruth Owen**

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# A Big Operation

It was the day of the big operation. In fact, it was to be a jumbo operation in every way! On September 20, 2012, a team of vets and nurses were preparing to carry out an eye operation.



The patient was Duchess, a 42-year-old African elephant. Duchess had already had her right eye removed. Now her left eye had **cataracts**. This condition makes the see-through lens in an eye turn cloudy. Poor Duchess could no longer see from her remaining eye.



The operation took place in Duchess's enclosure at Paignton Zoo, in Devon, England.

As Duchess's keepers quietly talked to her to reassure her, zoo vet Ghislaine Sayers injected the huge elephant with a powerful dose of **general anesthetic**. Slowly, Duchess sank to her knees and then rolled onto her side. When the medical team was sure she was asleep, they quickly went to work.

# A Team Effort for Duchess

As Duchess the elephant slept, veterinary **ophthalmologist** Jim Carter began the operation. An ophthalmologist is a vet or doctor who is an expert at treating eye diseases and problems.

To treat Duchess's cataracts, Jim used an ultrasonic handpiece. This tool makes tiny vibrations. The vibrations broke up the cataracts, or cloudy parts of the eye's lens. Then Jim used another tool to suck the damaged tissue from the eye.

During the operation, vets and nurses monitored Duchess's heartbeat and breathing. Each time she breathed out, they measured the amount of carbon dioxide gas in her breath. This told the team if Duchess was breathing normally or needed help.



Vet Jim Carter operating on Duchess's eye



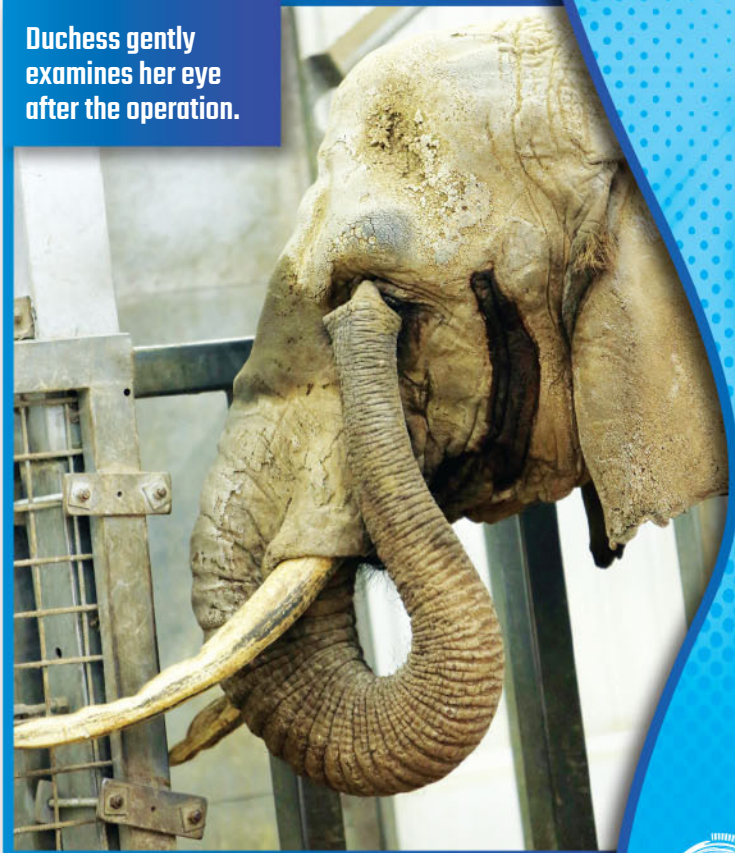
The vets gave Duchess oxygen and anesthetic gases through her trunk.



After nearly three hours, the operation was complete. Duchess was given another injection. This one contained a chemical to wake her up.

As the elephant wobbled to her feet, everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Thanks to the skills of the veterinary team, not only had Duchess survived the operation, but now she would be able to see again!

Duchess gently examines her eye after the operation.



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## Read More

**Owen, Ruth.** *Zoologists and Ecologists (Out Of The Lab: Extreme Jobs in Science)*. New York: Rosen Publishing (2014).

**Thomas, William David.** *Veterinarian (Cool Careers: Helping Careers)*. New York: Gareth Stevens Publishing (2009).

## Learn More Online

To learn more about zoo vets, go to:  
[www.rubytuesdaybooks.com/zoovet](http://www.rubytuesdaybooks.com/zoovet)

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# The Wild World of a **Zoo Vet**

How do you fix a giant tortoise's damaged shell? What could cause a red river hog to unexpectedly lose weight? And how do you perform an eye operation on an elephant? It's all in a day's work for a busy zoo vet.

Each day, zoo vets are hard at work dealing with emergencies, performing operations, and keeping some of the world's rarest animals healthy. From microchipping a baby Komodo dragon to taking an X-ray of a tiger's leg, zoo vets use technology and their science skills to take care of zoo animals—big and small!

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