

the dentist too

STEVE MORGAN



ador patient. She studied in the US, where animal dentistry is well-established

misaligned tooth pierced a blood vessel.

Farmers too have long been concerned about the problem of "broken mouthed" sheep. Being herbivores, sheep have lower front teeth which do not bite on a top set of teeth, but on a specially roughened dental pad. At three to four years of age, these teeth often start to loosen and drop out, and the animal cannot eat properly. Wool and meat quality drops, and the sheep cannot — or will not — breed. One remedy tried in Australia was to fit the sheep with dentures so that the animals could feed properly. Individual results appeared encouraging, but the project failed because of the difficulty of maintaining false teeth for sheep over a few million square miles.

Sue Penman has had requests to fit crowns for police dogs, but the reality is that the dog can bite just as hard with a stump — and would probably break the artificial crown anyway if it had contrived to break the immensely strong original.

In zoos, the big cats and bears seem to have a predisposition to break or shatter canine teeth, and they simply refuse to breed until the problem is resolved — although they show no outward signs of pain. But the logistics of dealing with

such problems can be awesome, as many of these teeth are much longer than the human equivalent and have a very different structure.

It is sometimes forgotten that an elephant's tusks are nothing more than elongated teeth, and dealing with a broken tusk presents something of a problem: in one case in the USA handled by Peter Emily, the broken tusk, being vital and supplied with blood vessels, bled very badly and needed a pulpotomy to seal the cavity. A restoration was needed on top of this, but the elephant kept knocking it off. With some lateral thinking coupled with desperation, the eventual solution was to cement the brass ferrule from a chair leg on to the end of the tusk, which lasted until the tusk had regrown.

Animal dentistry is not a fad, nor is it an excuse for loving owners to lavish money on their pets. The modern diet is as damaging to our pets' teeth as it is to our own. But perhaps the 40 per cent of the population who do not visit a dentist regularly should put their own house in order before we can expect them to have the same consideration for pets.

The writer is a (human) dentist.