

Pachyderms On Planes!

The Amazing Angolan Ambassadors

Why Is Maggie In Angola?

Why do people want to move elephants? How in the world do you move an elephant? These are the questions that Maggie hopes to answer in her new adventure. Maggie and Dude are in Angola to watch the amazing spectacle of several elephant groups arriving at a national park in this country. Angola is a country that has had many troubles over the years. Returning some animals to this park has already made local citizens feel pride in their country. It is hoped that the people and the economy of Angola will be helped in a peaceful way through this mission.

Why Does Angola Need Help?

In 1961 a war started in this African country. It was a colony of Portugal. The people of Angola wanted their independence from this European country. Many groups backed by different countries got involved. It is not always easy to understand the many issues involved in a conflict such as this. But what did happen was that the people had a difficult time making a living, getting food, and receiving medical treatment. Landmines had been placed in many areas of Angola. Because of this, many people lost limbs. Today, these people need proper healthcare and support to make a living. In any war, there is death. Thousands of people were killed in this conflict as well as millions of animals. Some animals were killed for food. The valuable tusks of other animals like elephants were sold to buy weapons for the warring people.

Because of the war and poaching, much of the natural habitat of the country was destroyed. Herds of animals once roamed the parks of Angola. Now these parks are almost empty. It is to one

of these parks that Maggie and Dude now travel. Quiçama National Park is the scene of an exciting elephant transfer!

How Are People Helping?

An international group lead by Angolan and South African people came together in 1996 and formed the Kissama Foundation. This foundation is working to relocate native animals to the area.

One of the foundation's important missions is to help the people of Angola. Local people are employed in the park. They will also have jobs in the tourist facilities that will be built. The foundation wants to provide opportunities for Angola to develop its economy. The Angolans, who have seen some of the animals returned to the park, are proud that their country's natural beauty is being restored. To help in this effort, many people from around the world support the foundation.

Helping Each Other!

It seems strange but parts of South Africa have too many elephants. Habitat is being destroyed by these animals who need a lot of room and a lot of food! One of the solutions is to cull these animals. That means that some animals must be killed so that others can live.

"Why not move elephants from South Africa to Angola?" is a question some people asked. That would solve two problems: South Africa's elephant over population and Angola's elephant under population. But, before elephants can be moved, some questions had to be answered. Which elephants should be moved? How in the world can you move an elephant?

Which Elephants Should Be Moved?

You might think that it is best to move baby elephants. It certainly would be easier to move little elephants than to move

grown up elephants. But, this isn't good for the elephants. Scientists have found that elephants, like people, need good role models. Young elephants can become young elephant delinquents if they don't have older elephants to show them how to behave. That means that family groups of elephants must be kept together. Researchers observe the elephants carefully to see which family groups might be moved successfully.

How In The World Do You Move An Elephant?

One group of elephants already calls Angola home. These elephants didn't travel first class, but they did have a plane ride to their new home. It sounds amazing, but a large plane from Russia made two trips and brought a total of sixteen elephants to Quiçama National Park in September 2000.

Sadly, one elephant had an accident during the journey and died. The other elephants made the trip successfully. It seems that the animals are comfortable in their new habitat. A baby elephant was born into one of the family groups in January 2001.

Local people serve as game wardens. People who were wounded in the war or lost limbs in landmine explosions are also employed in the park. They monitor and protect the resident pachyderms. This employs people in meaningful and important jobs.

In Angola there is a lot of excitement about the return of large animals to the country. Because the war had been going on for so long, many Angolans had never seen elephants before. Their return meant a return of the Angolan heritage. These elephants are helping to restore national pride.

What Is Eco-Tourism?

It is hoped that Quiçama National Park will be visited by many tourists. There are plans to build lodges, trails, and create other opportunities that are environmentally responsible. The needs of

the tourists will provide more local jobs. This has been successful in other parts of the world. Local people are then able to support themselves and take care of the natural environment around them. Supporters of the foundation feel that this is a winning plan. The people of Angola and its environment will both be helped!

The Kissama Foundation realizes that it will take many years before enough international tourists will visit the park to make it self-sufficient. Even today, some countries, like the United States, warn their citizens not to go to Angola. These governments are worried about continued fighting in the country. Angolans do visit their park. Each weekend, many people from the capital city of Luanda arrive to see the elephants and other animals that are returning to their homeland. Amazingly, after the return of the elephants to Quiçama, antelopes, monkeys, and other animals began to return on their own. Nature is beginning to restock this park on its own!

Elephant Ambassadors!

The Quiçama National Park is a first step to help the people of Angola. It is hoped that Angolans will feel proud of their heritage and environment. People will be able to see meaningful ways in which they can help their country. Peace will be restored in the area. Perhaps, then, many tourists will visit this park and see the elephant ambassadors that came to the country to help restore national pride.

Looking At Two Sides Of An Issue

As with many important issues, there are various viewpoints about moving animals into Angola and reestablishing a national park in the area. To help students understand that there are differing viewpoints about issues, we suggest assigning one of the following activities to members of your class.

- A. Divide the students into groups and have a debate about Quiçama National Park. You may want to have 3 or 4 students on each side. Have the rest of the class provide feedback about points that students made that were particularly strong.
- B. Ask students to write an editorial for a paper either supporting the national park or opposing the park.
- C. Assign students to write an essay that looks at the park from both points of view.

If students are writing or speaking in favor of Quiçama National Park, help them realize the following issues:

1. Some animals could be culled because they exist in overabundance in some parts of Africa. For example, there are too many elephants in South Africa. Certain parts of South Africa are being destroyed by elephant overpopulation. Many people feel it is better to move the elephants to a national park than to kill them.
2. The area in Angola has been the scene of a civil war. Bringing animals into the park will help establish national pride.
3. People in Angola need jobs. By establishing this national park, local people will be employed as game wardens and other needed workers. There are many people in Angola who have lost limbs due to the civil war and land mine explosions. The park will employ these people in meaningful jobs.
4. This national park will help the economy of Angola. It will encourage eco-tourism. Then the country can work toward economic independence.

Those opposing the park should think about the following issues:

1. Some animals could die or be injured during the move.
2. It is difficult and very costly to find vehicles big enough to move large animals.
3. Angola has been the scene of a civil war. It will be a long time before enough tourists visit the area to make the park financially independent.
4. It takes a lot of money to move animals. It would be more helpful to just give money to the people of Angola so they could get food, supplies, and medical attention.

Other writing topics:

Imagine that you are an Angolan who has not seen elephants in your country for many years. Describe the way you feel when you see the elephants get off the plane and set foot on your country's soil.

Tell the story of the move from South Africa to Angola from the point of view of an elephant.

Write a description of the way you imagine the Quiçama National Park will look when it is repopulated with animals.

Write a short speech for a park ranger to give to tourists who are visiting Quiçama National Park.

Design and make a brochure that tries to raise money for the expense of repopulating Quiçama National Park.