

SERVING HAMPTON ROADS AND NORTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA

With its own little piece of Africa, zoo aims for bigger place on the map

BY PAUL CLANCY

THE VIRGINIAN PILOT

NORFOLK — It was a sultry day on the delta, and the elephants were nervous. They looked out from their enclosure at a strange new habitat, a rolling grass-covered field bordered by granite hills, with a deep pool slowly filling with water.

In the distance there was a jarring sound, the roar of machines tearing down the only place the elephants had ever known. The large-mammal building, built in 1968, was coming down and, with

it, the old way of displaying animals at the Virginia Zoo.

The Okavango Delta area, the new home of the zoo's elephants, rhinoceroses and a

View the African village at the zoo. pilotonline.com

cast of other African wildlife superstars, is scheduled to open to the public May 4 along with a new entry and education complex. They're not just new features at an old zoo. They're the realization of a long-held dream to come up to par with top zoos around the nation in terms of animal habitat,

species preservation and conservation education.

Last week, the zoo's two African elephants were warily adjusting to their new surroundings, venturing into a holding area just long enough to roll around and throw mud at each other.

Zoo officials have little doubt, however, that the elephants will thrive in their new habitat — and that the zoo will, too.

Though they are reluctant to make attendance predictions, Azeo Torre of the

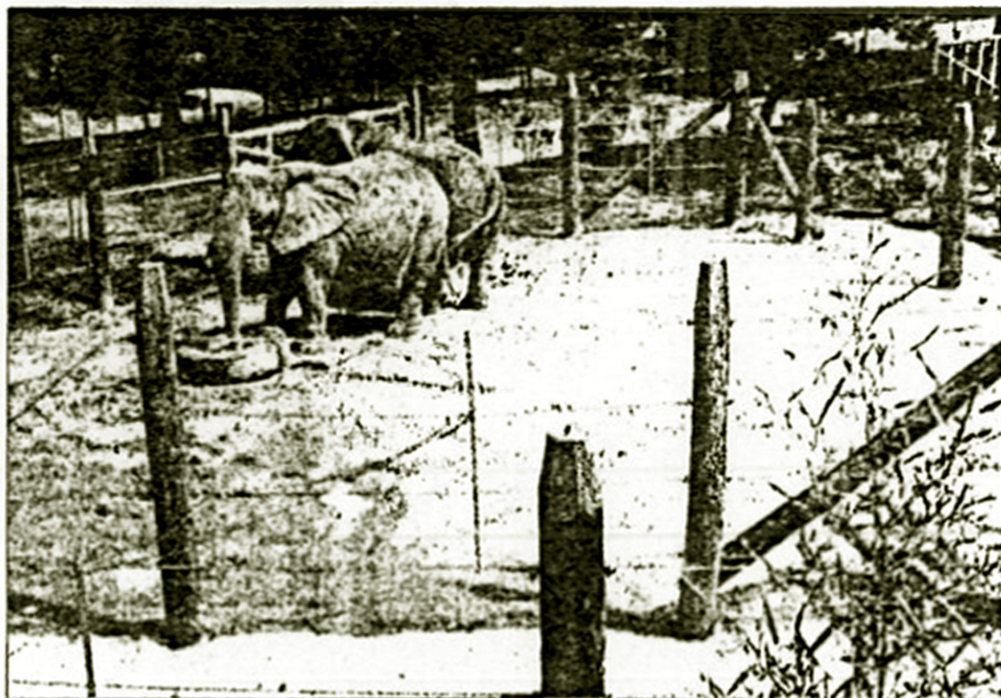
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The Virginia Zoo's pair of African elephants stick close together as they adjust to their new home in the Okavango Delta area.



The Okavango Delta

area and the new entry and education complex at the Virginia Zoo are scheduled to open May 4.



MARK P. MITCHELL/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT