

Libraries curate elephant data for online Open Access

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In 2010, Nairobi based conservation practitioner Ian Parker donated his professional papers to the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries. These manuscripts cover wildlife related issues representing his over fifty-year career; first as a Game Warden in the Colonial Kenya Game Department in the 1950s, with Wildlife Services, Ltd. (East Africa's first wildlife research and management consultancy) from 1964-1976, and as an independent consultant until Parker's retirement in 2011. The [Ian Parker Collection Relating to East African Wildlife Conservation](#) complements other African wildlife related acquisitions also open for research, the [Graham and Brian Child African Wildlife and Range Management Collection](#), which notably documents CAMPFIRE community conservation programs across Zimbabwe, and the [Records of the East African Professional Hunters Association](#), a group that was influential in establishing Kenya's wildlife conservation policies, wildlife tourism, and game laws from 1934-1974.

Among Parker's manuscripts is a unique, substantial set of elephant biological records. Curated within the collection are 3,175 data sheets that, from 1965 to 1969, Wildlife Services, Ltd. teams collected during large-scale culling operations designed to mitigate overpopulation at environmentally stressed sites in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Project teams estimated ages, weighed organs, measured body parts, recorded sex and reproductive status, and noted other observations. It is unlikely that similar information will be collected again for such a large group of elephants from wild populations. With the goal of making these significant records easily available after 45 years in private hands, the original handwritten [Elephant Data Sheets](#) were processed for preservation and access on site, before being digitized and loaded to the [University of Florida Digital Collections](#) (UFDC).

While image files of handwritten field data enable open access for readers online, the format is of limited use because these records cannot be analyzed as is. Recognizing the enhanced value transcription would add to the data, UF Health Science Center Library's Veterinary Medicine liaison Hannah Norton and I were awarded internal funding in 2013 for [The Parker elephant data sheets: A library minigrant project proposal](#). A team of students transcribed the records over the summer in order to make the data accessible in an online digital format, which as a result can be downloaded directly into spreadsheet or statistical applications. Detailed information and a codebook are also available along with the data file in: [The Ian Parker East African Elephant Data Sheets: A handbook for the transcribed biological data set](#).

The Parker collection includes other primary sources as well as scarce, rare, and unique wildlife conservation materials unavailable elsewhere until now. Some of the most significant reports were also digitized, of which a few examples may suffice to encourage research use. In 1960, Parker implemented the [Galana Scheme](#), which broke with established practices to recognize Watta hunter-gatherers as managers of community resources rather than elephant poachers. Another area Parker is recognized as having been particularly influential (if controversial) is in his reports on the world trade in elephant ivory. Until now these confidential reports have been nearly impossible for researchers to access. This generous gift and grant of permission allows UFDC to make these reports freely available online: [Black Report](#) (1971), [White Report](#) (1973), [Ebur](#) (1975), [The Ivory Trade](#) (1979), and [The Raw Ivory Trade](#) (1989). We welcome researchers to use these online materials and to further explore manuscripts available on site in the Smathers Library Grand Reading Room.

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