Acknowledgements

My research would not have been possible without the help of numerous people and organizations. Many people generously helped me in a variety of ways, and I am thankful to all of them. I am extremely grateful to my supervisors; Dr. K. Sankar and Shri. Qamar Qureshi for providing me a wonderful opportunity to be a part of this project and for allowing me to chose a research topic that was so different and of most interest to me. I appreciate their guidance, academic support and encouragement with the project design, all the way through till the analyses and execution. It has been rewarding, personally and professionally, to work with them.

I express my sincere gratitude to Mr. P. R. Sinha, Director, WII and Dr. V. B. Mathur Dean, FWS, WII for the support and guidance extended to my project. I am grateful to the Chief Wildlife Warden, Tamil Nadu for granting me the permission to conduct my research in Mudumalai. I thank the Field Director, Dr. Rajeev Srivastava, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve for providing me all the logistic support and cooperation in the field. I thank renowned veterinarian, Dr. Kalaivanan for notifying me about every road-kill incident or injured/rescued animal, specifically small carnivores, even in the midst of his busy schedule. All the range officers, forest guards, anti-poaching watchers and local tribal communities of Mudumalai and Sigur-Singara Reserved Forests are thanked for their timeless assistance and invaluable field knowledge. My data collection would not have been possible without the sincere and tireless efforts put in by my field assistants, James, Kethan, Mathan, Kunmari, Manpan, Maran, Anith, and Somu. Despite our erratic field schedule, they endured the difficult field conditions to ensure we completed the targeted task successfully at the end of the day. I always felt like being a part of their tribal community and will always cherish the memorable times I had listening to their captivating jungle lores. I now somehow feel like the sole messenger to the modern world.

I could not have come this far without the help of Dr. T. Ramesh who was the main pioneer of the project. His knowledge, technical skills and boundless support has always been unforgettable. I wish to specially thank IUCN/SSC Small Carnivore Specialists, Drs. Divya Mudappa, Senior Scientist at the Nature Conservation
Foundation, Andy Jennings and Geraldine Veron, Biologists at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Département Systématique et Evolution, for being an immense source of inspiration in my study. Their articles, research papers and sincere dedication towards the conservation of small carnivores helped instill in me great love for this group of species. My appreciation goes to Dr. Goyal, Senior scientist, WII for his useful discussions on the genetics of small carnivores which brought creative insights in my thesis. Special thanks to Dr. Hussain, Scientist and Hostel warden, WII for making my stay extremely comfortable at the old hostel even after the completion of my tenure as a Research Fellow.

I thank Dr. Archana Bahuguna, Scientist at the Zoological Survey of India, Dehra Dun for her guidance in the preservation of rodent specimens. I wish to thank senior researchers from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore; Mr. H.S. Dattaraja, Mr. H.S. Suresh, Mr. Kannan, Dr. Prakash, Mr. Barnaya, Ms. Nandita Mondal, Ms. Geetha Ramaswami and Ms. Rutuja, for making my field days most enjoyable. Their jovial discussions on the functional ecology of the tropical forest in Mudumalai, was extremely informative and thought provoking.

I thank Ms. Parabita Basu and Ms. Swathi Saini for helping me with the basics in GIS mapping and analyses. My sincere thanks goes to all the technical and general staff at WII; Mr. Vinod Thakur for his expertise and valuable assistance in scat analysis, especially with rodent identification. I am thankful to the assistance provided by Mr. Virendra Sharma during my thesis arrangement and Mr. Gyanesh Chibber for administrative support.

My very warmest thanks to friends at WII; Kunzes, Chongpi, Satem, Anupaya, Parabita, Ridhima, Pooja, Ashi, Upma, Preeti and Malem and for making my thesis-writing at the hostel full of fun and frolic. I owe them, a debt of gratitude for all the emotional support they provided throughout this process. I have appreciated their friendship, company and time shared together.

I am also greatly indebted to Kumar’s family, who assisted our entire team with the transportation, accommodation, and all other logistic support in Mudumalai. I am so
appreciative of the support that I have received from my family who are quite possibly excited about my work. I thank my mother, specially, for being patient, understanding and a pillar of strength all these years and for giving me the freedom to pursue my career in one of the most bizarre professions. I thank her for having put up with my obsession for wildlife and nature and encouraged me to pursue it further. Her guidance, and belief in me has been constant and unwavering. She made this thesis possible and it is to her that I dedicate it!

I have to admit that the people that I have met since my post-graduation and with whom I had the opportunity to work and/or interact with, all helped strengthen me as a wildlife researcher. I look forward to working with all of you in the future as we venture on into scientific endeavors and good times.

(Riddhika Kalle)