PREFACE

Deltaic Sundarbans of the Ganga river basin is located in the Hooghly-Matla estuarine complex on the eastern seaboard of the Indian subcontinent and supports the world's most exciting and magnificent mangrove ecosystem. Despite of sheltering a number of world's most graceful game, the ecosystem also supports rich estuarine flora and fauna in hundreds of creeks and tributaries, salt marshes and sand and mudflats, in the form of plankton, nekton and benthos.

A mini marine laboratory, 'The Susama Devichaudhurani Marine Biological Research Institute', unique of its kinds in this environment has been established in 1969 at Sagar Island, a typical Gangetic delta lobe, situated in the mouth of the river Hooghly. This laboratory has so kindly shouldered the responsibility of providing facilities to the enthusiastic researchers and scientists fascinated in marine and estuarine science, to explore the alluring vista of this unique ecosystem.

The present author gratefully availed of this opportunity which rendered possible the preparation of this dissertation on the "Ecology and community interactions of 'Fiddler crabs' in Sundarbans mangrove ecosystem, India".

As no substantial work on this important area has been dealt
with in the eastern sector of this subcontinent so far, the author was tempted to undertake this fascinating problem on the brachyuran crab materials inhabiting the mudfloors of the Sundarbans mangrove swamps.

This investigation forms a small part of the multi-year and multi-tier integrated mangrove ecosystem research programme in the deltaic Sundarbans, which has been launched by the Department of Marine Sciences, Calcutta University in 1980 with the financial assistance of the Department of Science and Technology, and the Department of Environment and Forests, Government of India.

Six stations enjoying varied ecotones in Sagar Island have been chosen as the venue to study the 'Fiddler crab community' and the associates, their ecology and biology in relation to the prevailing environmental parameters. It is being hoped that this study venture in this rigorous environment of estuarine complex may pave the way and stimulate fresh investigation on the many other macrobenthic fauna that abound the intertidal salt marshes of the deltaic Sundarbans of the Indian subcontinent.