Acknowledgements

My experience of pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree is perhaps a good example of how not to pursue one. That said, while the hurdles were many, three people overshadowed everything else to bring the thesis to fruition – Divya Karnad, Dr. Kavita Isvaran and Dr. Ajith Kumar. I am fortunate to have Dr. Ajith Kumar as my guide. His understanding, infectious energy and sound advice on the academic, professional and personal fronts were invaluable to navigate and sail through the tough times. He is a mentor like no other.

I thank Dr. Ghazala Shahabuddin for her advice, discussions at the Ambedkar University, Delhi and for making time to visit Nannaj. Dr. Kavita took me under her wing at the Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), Indian Institute of Science and apart from providing the intellectual underpinnings for this study, encouraged ideas, gave me a free hand and put up with umpteen last-minute requests with patience. Her ability to lift the densest fog of R code over a few minutes of discussion is unparalleled.

I have much to learn from Divya Karnad, my better half in almost every way and whose advice I have often ignored to my own peril. Her belief and love are the prime movers behind this journey. As we are inching towards submitting our theses and adding the finishing touches to this phase of our lives, we have embarked on our next voyage with the arrival of our daughter Aditi. She has been a source of joy, wonder and has provided a welcome break from the long hours of writing over the past few months.
My family has always been there for me, I was the one who was conspicuously absent due to the prolonged stints in the field. The Centre for Wildlife Studies played a pivotal role and I thank Dr. K Ullas Karanth for his support. I am indebted to Srinivas, Sunita and Ravi at the Foundation for Ecological Research, Advocacy and Learning (FERAL) for providing a work arrangement that enabled much of the analysis and thesis writing to be completed. CES provided the administrative and logistical support through the entire duration of the study and well beyond. Palani, Manavalan, Raghavendra, Basavaraj, Lakshmi and Reva Rani provided timely help and assistance to smoothen the laborious red-tape jungle.

My brothers in arms - Sarang Mhamane and Shivkumar ‘Bapu’ More suffered long hours in the field in all seasons and diligently undertook mind numbing tasks. Their dedication went beyond the call of duty and they once escaped an irate mob by the skin of their teeth. I am honoured for the opportunity to have worked with them. I thank Nachiket Kelkar and Navendu Page for help with plant identification. I thank the Sankaran Lab at the National Centre for Biological Sciences for providing access to and trusting me with their equipment.

The Royal Norwegian Embassy and Ministry of Environment and Forests (India) funded the study. I thank the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research for providing travel grants to attend the Student Conference on Conservation Science – New York in 2011 and the United States Chapter of the International Association of Landscape Ecologists annual seminar in 2012 respectively.
The Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral and Professional Research Fellowship allowed me to explore new ideas and vistas. First and foremost, thanks are due to Cassandra Nuñez for the keystone role that she played. My heartfelt gratitude to Sudarshan Dash, Pratibha Nair and everyone else at the United States-India Educational Foundation who contributed tirelessly to make this experience a most memorable one. At Princeton University, I thank Professor Daniel Rubenstein for hosting me, Blair and Qing for company and useful discussions. I thank Dr. Jay Kirkpatrick, TJ Holmes and Patricia Hatle for providing a tantalizing view into the world of immuno-contraception.

I am grateful to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Maharashtra State Forest Department for granting permission to work in the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary at Nannaj. I thank Dr. Y.L.P. Rao - Conservator of Forests (Pune) and M.K. Rao - Conservator of Forests (Pune) for constant support through the entire duration of the study. I thank Shri Dhumal - Assistant Conservator of Forests (Pune) and Shri Ramkrishna Adkar - Assistant Conservator of Forests (Pune) for encouragement and Forest Department staff at Nannaj for help with logistics.