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The role of disease risk and life history in the immune function of larks in different environments

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Acknowledgements

If you approach a new thesis book like me, then you will have probably reached this point by flicking through the pages to quickly look at the pictures. Maybe you checked how many chapters there are, or how many manuscripts I have already managed to get published. Perhaps, if you are close to the end of your own thesis, you actually bothered to read the introduction. Forget the science though; in all likelihood this is probably the first place that you have actually started reading in any detail. Well, so be it. In a world where most of the copies that I print will never be looked at again (let's be honest), my first acknowledgement is to say thanks for sticking with it even this far. Now let's get on with thanking the really important people.

In almost all acknowledgements people thank their partners last. I want to change that. After all, if I get this one wrong, I'll never be allowed to forget it! Sarah, thank you for all your support and help, both emotional and practical, throughout our time in Groningen. Thank you for moving to the Netherlands and for being understanding when I disappeared to Saudi Arabia for six weeks as soon as you arrived. Thank you for your help with designing assays and for listening to my complaints. Our Dutch adventure may have come to an end, but I anticipate many more exciting adventures together in the future, although perhaps with fewer bicycles and not so many bitterballen. Thanks also to my family and friends back in the UK, for putting up with the flying visits, and for your continual love and support.

I next want to acknowledge my supervisors, starting with Irene Tieleman. Events conspired against you for quite a period, with repercussions for all of us in the Tieleman group. Nonetheless, it has truly been an education learning with you and I think that is the greatest aim a supervisor can hope to achieve. I hope that you have gained from the experience as much as I have. I also realise the great debt that my own studies owe to the fantastic groundwork that you, Joe Williams and other collaborators laid down in your earlier studies on larks.

My second supervisor was Kevin Matson. Almost from day one we worked together, and it seems to have stayed that way throughout my entire time in Groningen, much to my benefit. Working so closely with someone whom I consider a real friend has been an added bonus and always made things more enjoyable, particularly when times were tough. This thesis owes much to the support and supervision that you provided and I am very grateful to you for that.

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Apart from my supervisors, the other members of the Tieleman group have provided invaluable scientific, practical and emotional support. In particular,

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As someone who collected samples for their PhD in Europe, Africa and Arabia, I can appreciate the value of good collaborators. Fortunately I was lucky enough to find such people in all the places I visited. In Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Shobrak and the staff at the National Wildlife Research Center and at Mahazat as-Sayd were unfailing in their welcome and assistance. Joe Williams taught me about the practicalities of conducting research in Saudi Arabia and the usefulness of phrases such as 'Ma fi mushkila'. Shukran to you and Irene for sharing your patch of desert with me.

Towards the end of the fieldwork component of my PhD, the opportunity to collect samples in Kenya was a real treat and introduced me to new friends. Ndithia, Dominic Kimani, Samuel Bakari and other Friends of Kinangop Plateau turned a trip that was initially meant for scoping out potential new field sites into a valuable data collection exercise and integral component of my thesis. I hope for more such visits in the future as Ndithia progresses in his own PhD so successfully. And Bakari, I am very pleased that Irene and I have been able to help you to complete your studies.

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Nicholas Horrocks, Cambridge, 22nd December 2011.

