
SYSTEMATIC MAMMALOLOGY
CONTRIBUTIONS IN HONOR OF
GUY G. MUSSER

EDITED BY
ROBERT S. VOSS AND MICHAEL D. CARLETON



BULLETIN OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

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HONOR OF GUY G. MUSSER

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PREFACE

Cut in stone over the entrance to the Ruthven Museum at the University of Michigan are the words “Go to nature, take the facts into your own hands; look, and see for yourself.” Like many other museum graduate students, I came to regard those words (attributed to Louis Agassiz) as the essence of what we were being taught to do. Later, I came to appreciate how well they described Guy’s research.

Guy was still a huge presence at Michigan, although he had not been there in person for 10 years, when I arrived in 1976. His specimens (impeccably prepared) filled dozens of drawers in the collection, his field notes (inimitably written) occupied several inches of shelf space in Hooper’s office, and his publications (incomparably illustrated) already took up most of a file drawer in the Mammal Division library. His was an inspiring but daunting example for a neophyte researcher.

Guy’s career began just as the influence of the New Systematics was beginning to wane. An earlier generation of mammalogists, encouraged by population geneticists to interpret taxonomic differences as geographic variation, had indulged in an orgy of lumping, synonymizing hundreds of valid taxa into undiagnosable polytypic “species,” often without even a token analysis of relevant data. The most egregious lumping was perpetrated by authors of continentwide checklists, notably Ellerman and Morrison-Scott (in Eurasia) and Angel Cabrera (in South America). Much of the progress in late 20th-century mammalian systematics consisted in rediscovering the diversity of species then concealed by synonymy, and in providing the diagnostic tools—new characters and ways of analyzing them—by which that diversity could be documented.

More than any other mammalogist of his generation, Guy showed that comparative

morphology was largely adequate to this task. All you had to do was look at the specimens (take the facts into your own hands), be able to see what you were looking at, and have the mother wit to draw the right conclusions. Most of us are influenced, to some extent at least, by what others have written or said about a long-standing research problem. One of Guy’s great gifts, I think, is to be undecieved by the opinions of others and to focus on the facts. He also documented those facts (patterns of morphological character variation) and explained their taxonomic interpretation with exceptional clarity. His publications set new standards in systematic mammalogy.

In organizing Guy’s festschrift, Mike and I decided that it would be more fitting to have just a few substantive contributions than to have a larger number of shorter papers. As it turned out, a “few” substantive contributions was plenty, as the heft of this volume attests. Among the many people who deserve our thanks for helping make this project a reality, we are particularly grateful to Nancy Simmons (who husbanded the Taxonomic Mammalogy funds to pay for most of it), to the late Karl Koopman (who endowed the Taxonomic Mammalogy Fund), to Mary Knight (who midwived the manuscript through the production process), and to our many colleagues who reviewed manuscripts of individual chapters (acknowledged by name, unless anonymous, therein). Supplementary funds that helped defray publication costs were generously provided by the City College of New York, by the Division of Mammals at the Field Museum, and by the Department of Vertebrate Zoology and the Office of Research and Collections at the National Museum of Natural History.

Robert S. Voss
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