I believe that dissertation work is a challenge for every PhD student, and it ought to be. However, such work is seldom the result of efforts by a sole person. Here I want to thank a number of people who helped me to master this challenge, in particular those people I did not mention in the acknowledgements of the previous chapters. Probably as many other students before me, I was captured by one of Rudi Drent’s talks, on this occasion at a waterfowl conference in Moscow. Later, at the conference dinner, I saw Rudi standing up to call out loudly ‘rabota! rabota! rabota!’ (i.e., “work”), a phrase so familiar to one who grew up in Eastern Germany that my wish to work under his supervision was readily born and has been finally realised. Rudi gave me the freedom to find a research niche within the group and to develop and pursue my own interests. That my efforts took me somewhat longer than usually expected for a PhD period partly reflects a broad interest. Rudi always showed great faith in my ventures, and his steady optimism and enthusiasm have been a great motivation for me. I very much enjoyed the time we spent together on expeditions to Russia, including many lessons in diplomacy combined with great storytelling. Rudi, you have been a great “Doktorvater” to me. I also would like to thank Nel for the warm welcome I received during frequent visits at your home. Two other people crucial to get me ‘into the boat’ were Jan Bakker and Julia Stahl. Jan and Julia, I very much enjoyed the cheerful atmosphere you have created, and I sincerely thank you for all your help in front of or behind the scenes. Henk van der Jeugd has been a major and close collaborator in this thesis work. Among many other contributions he handled a huge ringing programme, which has been so vital for the barnacle goose work. Joost Tinbergen was always accessible when I encountered scientific problems, and I learned a lot from his scrutiny of my statistics. Jouke Prop introduced me to the realm of goose feeding ecology. His meticulous working style and unrivalled endurance in observing geese at freezing temperatures from a one cubic meter blind has become the archetype of fieldwork for me since our first common expedition to Kanin in 2002.

This dissertation work has involved a lot of data collection, which would not have been possible without many helping hands. I want to acknowledge the help I received from students from the Van Hall Institute and the RuG: Astrid Tijdens,
René Adelerhof, Michiel Schouten, Annelies Pouw, Jacintha van Dijk, and our Russian colleagues: Konstantin Litvin, Elena Gurtovaya, Julia Karagicheva, Yuri Anisimov and Dimitri Ochinashko (I will miss our nail throwing competitions), Olga Pokrovskaya and Olga Lavrinenko. I further relied upon the valuable skills of ‘canon-Kees’ Oosterbeek for the trapping of spring-staging geese on Schiermonnikoog. As most of the data collection took place in remote Arctic places located within the Russian border zone, our success crucially depended on special logistics and a great deal of other organizational work. Konstantin Litvin (Bird Ringing Centre Moscow) played always a major role in the preparations for our international field expeditions. I am also grateful to Mennobart van Eerden (RIZA) who introduced me to the Tobseda study site and greatly facilitated the work there through his established network of reliable local supporters. The following people and institutions from Naryan Mar, Nenets Autonomous Region, provided logistical support or helped with visa, permissions and registration formalities: Andrey Glotov (State Nature Reserve ‘Nentskii’), Alexander Kusnyetsov (State Hunting Inspection), Yana Kislyakova and Natalya Nerobova (State Committee for Environmental Protection). Further help came from Harald Leummens (‘Partners for Water’ program of the Dutch government) and Valery Andreyev (Nature Museum Arkhangelsk). In the Netherlands, Vereneging Natuurmonumenten and Staatsbosbeheer provided permissions for work on Schiermonnikoog and at Hellegatsplaten, respectively. For additional logistical support I would like to thank Otto Overdijk, René van Loo and Ronald in ‘t Veld. In Haren Roelie and Sjoerd Veenstra took care of our goose stock at home.

Back from the field most of the data had yet to be retrieved from samples of various kinds. Most of the plant and goose dropping samples were analysed by Nelly Eck and Bert Venema from the COCON lab, Groningen and by the Chemical and Endocrinology lab led by Léon de Jonge from the Animal Science Group of the University of Wageningen. Marcel Klaassen (NIOO) welcomed me heartily to use the NIR machine in his lab and, supported by Harry Korthals and Steffen Hahn, provided furthermore the analysis of stable isotopes. I am grateful to Harro Meijer and Berthe Verstappen-Dumoulin (CIO Groningen) who provided the analysis of deuterium enrichments, thereby continuing the collaborative work initiated by the late Henk Visser. Data collection for this thesis would have been unimaginable without the right material and special adjustments of instruments. For this I could happily rely on the “gouden handen” of Ger Veltman from the “Instrumentenmakerij”. Jacob Hogendorf at COCON helped out with material and tools when urgently needed. At the British Antarctic Survey Vsevolod Afanasyev and James Fox were excellent partners in the venture of tracking birds by geolocation.

I would like to thank Franz Bairlein, Ron Ydenberg and Gilles Gauthier for their interest, time and comments on my thesis manuscript. Jeroen Creuwels, Nikita Chernetsov and Julia Karagicheva helped me with the Dutch and Russian summaries. Any congratulations on the visual attractiveness of the thesis I would like to forward to Dick Visser, who took care of layout and figures, and Jens Gregersen, for kindly allowing me to use one of his drawings on the cover.
I am grateful to all members of the Animal Ecology Group and a number of people from other departments for the inspiring and social atmosphere they created during my stay at the Biological Centre. Suus Bakker has been of invaluable help in meeting all the administrative demands. I want to thank Janske and Marion (my ‘paranimfs’), Richard, Eelke, Cas & Karen, Martijn & Lyanne, Martijn & Martine, Martin & Steffi, Popko, Leo & Corine, Dries, Yvonne, Arne, Chris, Nick, Kevin, Debbie, Liz & Thor, Maaike, Julia & Martin, Luc, Elske, Deniz, Jeroen, Herfita, Ilja, Peter, Kristin, Vivian and Ralf for all the social events in or outside the BC. During times in the field it was ‘erg gezellig’ with Sandra, Reinout, Roos, Esther and Ciska. I had also a lot of fun together with the diving-fanatics from Calamari, either in the water or over some ‘biertjes’. Finally I am thankful to ‘Bureau Carex’, and Lenze Hofstee and Linie Dijkstra in particular, for the provision of an affordable shelter over all those years. It has been a pleasure for me sharing the flat with Maarten Sonderen, and I want to thank him for the many inspiring discussions.

Last but not least, I want to thank my parents for raising me in one of Germany’s best birding areas, and for their steady support and faith in all my endeavours.

Götz Eichhorn

Thanks to dog Ashley, who tried its best keeping our house (nearly) mouse-free.