Chapter 1

They Sort Out Like Nuts and Bolts:
A Scientific Biography of Guy G. Musser

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INTRODUCTION

“They sort out like nuts and bolts,” or similar wording, was an assertion that regularly arose in my conversations or correspondence with Guy over the past 40 years. The “they” in this statement are species of Indo-Australian rodents (Muroidea: Muridae: Murinae), a diverse and taxonomically complex Old World group that would dominate his research contributions and secure his professional reputation as one of the foremost systematic mammalogists of his generation. The statement carried an implicit comparative context: it referenced Guy’s formative experiences with a comparably complex group of New World rodents, deer mice of the genus *Peromyscus* (Muroidea: Cricetidae: Neotominae), research that comprised some of his earliest taxonomic works. The subtle features consulted to distinguish *Peromyscus* species served to sharpen his eye for specific discrimination whenever applied to other muroid genera investigated thereafter, particularly *Rattus* and kin.

There is so much that needs to be done, so many groups [of Indo-Australian murids] that require good systematic revision, and just not enough time. *Melomys* is another example of a bottomless pit... All the previous work on the genus has been terrible.² We would not have had this problem if everyone had first worked and honed their skills on *Peromyscus*. (GGM, in litt., 31 March 1987)

How this innate, finely calibrated sense of discrimination as perfected through experiences with New World cricetids would lead to sorting the nuts and bolts of Old World murines is a story that bears telling from the beginning, at least from the academic beginnings.

ACADEMIC AND MUSEUM FOUNDATIONS (1956–1966)

Inevitabilities of a life lived are a beginning and an end. (GGM, in litt., 23 September 1997, apropos the sudden death of Karl Koopman, longtime friend and colleague in the American Museum of Natural History)

Guy Graham Musser was born 10 August 1936 in Salt Lake City, Utah, and there attended elementary and secondary public schools until 1955. Like many of his contemporaries who entered the profession of mammalogy in the middle 1900s (e.g., see various autobiographies in Phillips and Jones, 2005), Guy recalls a boyhood compulsion to be outdoors and a preference for activities that indulged his enjoyment of the natural world. The family lived on the outskirts of Salt Lake City, from where he liked to take a bus, east to the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains or west to the Great Salt Lake Desert, hike around all day, and catch a returning bus in the evening. Other foothills nearer home harbored a cool mountain stream and the site of his earliest attempts at trout fishing, which was to become a lifelong pursuit, partly escapist recreation and partly ongoing education. He and friends

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² Not long afterward, rigorous taxonomic reviews of the genus appeared (Menzies, 1990, 1996).