

**Conservation of the  
Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia fuciphaga*  
in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands**

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**The case of the Edible-nest Swiftlet is unique in entirety.  
It must be addressed as such.**

**Abstract**

The Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia fuciphaga* builds nests exclusively of saliva, which is highly prized in Chinese cuisine and pharmacy. Ranked amongst the world's most expensive animal products, excessive and uncontrolled nest collection has led to wide spread declines in population. However, when properly managed by following scientifically prescribed harvesting regimes, populations of the Edible-nest Swiftlet have shown remarkable recoveries with growth. Nest harvesting of swiftlets is ethically acceptable as it does not involve killing or constraining the birds in any way; that Swiftlet nest harvesting is a unique case that needs innovative conservation approaches.

Between 1999 and 2007, the Department of Environment and Forests, Andaman & Nicobar Island and the Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, have been implementing an innovative peoples participatory program to conserve swiftlets. The program has resulted in significant growth in population as well as in establishing a population of Edible-nest Swiftlet in a house, as a precursor to wide spread house ranching. The program has completed two R & D phases. The scientific ecological studies on the species has formed a corner stone of the conservation programme, and the information collected on the nesting, roosting and foraging habitat requirements, breeding seasonality and biology, population growth and dispersal patterns of the species has helped significantly in making decisions.

The basis for this participatory program has been the economic benefits that will accrue from scientifically managed harvesting systems as well as the growth in population of swiftlets leading to further economic benefit. So far the conservation program at select cave sites has resulted in a 59% growth in population, and a population of the Edible-nest Swiftlet has also been established in a house. Currently, two research and development Phases have been completed, and the expansion of the programme, Phase 3, to other sites in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is recommended. Critical to this is the delisting of the Edible-nest Swiftlet from the Schedules of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, in which it was inadvertently placed in 2002, so as to enable the people and tribes of the Andaman & Nicobar islands to both participate and truly benefit from the conservation of swiftlets.