

Conservation of the Edible-nest Swiftlet
Collocalia fuciphaga in the Andaman and
Nicobar Islands **2009-2012**

Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History, Coimbatore
in collaboration with
Department of Environment & Forest
Andaman & Nicobar Islands

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Nicobar Islands

Technical Report

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By

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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, more than 80% in Andaman and Nicobar islands. 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. While the conservation efforts were successfully on-going, the globally least concern species was inadvertently placed in the Schedule-I of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) in 2002.

From 1999 onwards the Department of Environment and Forests, Andaman & Nicobar Island and the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History have been implementing an innovative people's 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. After depicting successful *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation of the species between 1999 and 2008, the species was conditionally de-listed from the Schedules of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) during 2008 for three years.

The on-going phase 3 was initiated during 2009. In the current phase cave protection has been expanded to one more site and total 35% in addition on 59% growth in population (1999-2007) at select cave sites has been recorded between 2009 and 2012. Small population of the Edible-nest Swiftlet has also been established in one of the *ex-situ* house. The harvesting system is developed and around 4500 (almost 50% not in good condition) nests are already harvested (2010-2012) in a scientifically managed way with the help of the nest protectors (previously known nest collectors converted into nest protectors). These harvested nests, in legal international market may fetch close to 70 Lakhs (approximate).

The scientific ecological studies on the species during last and current phases 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 is helping significantly in making decisions.

At present, initial part of Phase 3 is done with remarkable success and it is recommended to expand the program to other sites in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Critical to this is the delisting of the Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia fuciphaga* also known as *Aerodramus fuciphagus* from the Schedules of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, so as to enable the people and tribes of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands to both participate and truly benefit from the conservation of swiftlets.

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