CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Vocalizations of Swiftlets are particularly interesting, because Swiftlets are almost unique among birds by the ability of some species to echolocate. Their ability is to use a simple yet effective form of echolocation as a navigator in the darkness through the chasm and shafts of the caves where they roost at night and breed. Songs and calls play a very important role in the lives of Swiftlets as they do not have a strong sense of smell that they can rely only on vision and sound. The sounds that Swiftlets use for echolocation are rather stereotyped clicks, which are usually double click, but sometimes also of a single click design.

Due to the market demanding on using edible birds’ nests, Swiftlets had become a farming industry. Nowadays, the Swiftlets’ farmers will record the sounds from the original habitats of in caves and play it through speakers which had been installed in the new Swiftlets’ building to make the surrounding exactly as in the cave of the Swiftlets’ original habitats. The Swiftlets sounds are different for the Internal and External of the
farm. To maintain the number of nests produced, the Swiftlets farm itself have to be convenient and the most important thing is to have a good mating and chirps sound.

1.2 Overview of Swiftlets

Swiftlets are small Swifts as can be seen in Figure 1.1. People often confused with Swallows as because they are having resemble appearance and obtain a similar food niche of aerial insects. Swiftlets are insectivorous and first-class flyers with high velocity and maneuverability. By having prominent flying abilities, this enables them to catch their prey in the air or from leaves while fluttering through tree canopies. Swiftlets occur at all altitudes, from lowland to high in the mountains. In group, they occupy a rather wide range of feeding habitat, covering dense forests, open cultivated land, barren mountain ranges, and even towns, which provide buildings as modern cave-like nest farms. One of the notable features of Swiftlets is that they roost and nest in caves or cave-like structures as shown in Figure 1.2.
Swiftlets are probably best known for the edible nests that are produced by several species. In early seventh century, their nests were famous among the Chinese, who attribute healing powers to the nests. This is the reason why many Chinese make tinctures and soups with Swiftlet nests as one of the ingredients. The edible part of the nests consists of the hardened Swiftlet saliva that is used to glue twigs or feathers together and to the wall of a cave as shown in Figure 1.1.

The most valuable nests are the nests that completely consist of saliva. Present day prices are up to a few thousand US dollars for one kilo of good quality, cleaned nests, which are ready for consumption as shown in Figure 1.3. Thus, Swiftlet farming has become a lucrative business. Swiftlet colonies are therefore carefully nursed and protected against nest thieves. The nests are harvested twice during a breeding season, where once just before the first eggs are laid and once after the chicks have fledged.