It’s really, ‘white gold’ from Asia

Swallow farmers become rich by selling edible bird nests, disposing of their successful swallow farms or even by doing both. This is according to "one of the most successful swallow farm operators in Malaysia," Dr. Lim, who holds the record of achieving "the second fastest growth rate in edible bird nest production in the country."

Having gone through an "immense learning curve", this millionaire swallow farmer knows what he’s talking about. Involved in swallow farming since June 2001, he now operates two swallow farms, part-time, one a shophouse and the other a bungalow, both located in Pahang.

On occasions, he conducts seminars on swallow farming. But, full-time, he’s a senior medical lecturer and head of the nephrology unit at Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Besides teaching commitments, Dr. Lim provides regular clinical consultancy services to the Seremban, Putrajaya and Kajang hospitals.

The kidney specialist also has a keen interest in clinical research and has published numerous original research findings in international medical journals.

So how does swallow farming fit in for him? "I clean up swallow droppings, harvest the nests and thoroughly check all the electrical components including humidifier, audio system and timers at the farms once every four to six weeks to make sure everything’s in order," he explained.

A successful farm, he elaborated, should be able to produce one edible bird’s nest in each square foot, every four months. A standard 20x by 700 square-foot shophouse with a build-up area of 2,800sq ft should produce 2,800 nests every four months.

This adds up to 8,400 edible nests a year and assuming that the selling price is RM450 a kilo, the return on investment would be RM134,000 a year.

He said the swallow population follows exponential growth until nesting spaces are saturated, usually in five to seven years. When that occurs, the existing swallows do not migrate, so owners can still earn handsome sums.

The new swallow farmers in farms would have to go and find new homes - so this is when the farm has to be expanded.

On wealth from swallow farming, he said a successful farm would have to pay RM66,000 for a shophouse for RM255,000 and spend another RM460,000 to convert it into a swallow farm worth at least RM850,000 after two years. This works out to a 161 per cent return on investment - or the original purchase plus conversion cost and the market price of RM1,000 per edible bird’s nest.

Dr. Lim said that one can also make money from swallow farming by being a middleman in edible bird’s nest trading, by processing the nests for the local and foreign markets, exporting them or even

Swallow building edible bird nests on the corner of a swallow farm.

For more information, surf to www.swallowfarming.com.my.