



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***MORPHOMETRY OF AND GENETIC VARIATION IN MTDNA OF THE  
EDIBLE NEST SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus fuciphagus Thunberg*)  
IN MALAYSIA***

KOLADE OLUWASEYI MODUPE

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IN MALAYSIA**

**KOLADE OLUWASEYI MODUPE**

**By**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia  
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

**July 2014**

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Abstract of thesis to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfillment of the  
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By

**KOLADE OLUWASEYI MODUPE**

**July 2014**

**Chairman :** Professor Jothi Malar Panandam, PhD  
**Faculty :** Agriculture

*A. fuciphagus* (edible nest swiftlets) naturally inhabit the limestone caves of South East Asia, but recently swiftlet ranching in man-made houses has become popular. These swiftlets are of commercial importance because of their unique nests produced wholly of the mucilaginous secretion from the salivary glands and highly valued for their nutritional, aphrodisiac and medicinal properties. Limited works are available on the genetics of this swiftlet, especially in Malaysia. There is also a lack of knowledge about the spatial delineation of the swiftlet species in Malaysia.

This study was carried out to elucidate information on genetic variability of *A. fuciphagus* by analysing seven mtDNA genes (*cytb*, *ND2*, *ND3*, *ND5*, *12S rRNA*, *16S rRNA* and *COI*), with the hope of identifying DNA barcodes for the purpose of traceability of the edible bird nests (EBNs). Morphometric parameters of the birds were also evaluated so that the variations observed among locations may be associated with variations among the molecular markers.

For the morphometric study, 33 birds captured humanely from five locations in West Malaysia (Bachok, Kota Bharu and Tanah Merah in Kelantan, Kuala Terengganu in Terengganu, and Sungkai in Perak) were measured for beak thickness, length of beak, tail length, leg length and wing length. There were no significant differences in the beak thickness of the EBN swiftlets from the five locations, while significant ( $P<0.05$ ) differences were observed for the other parameters among some locations. There were no significant correlation between body weight and beak thickness, beak length, leg length, wing length and tail length there were no association existing between the body weight and morphometric parameters. Generally, there seemed to be no clear pattern of geographical variations for the morphometric traits investigated among the locations.

For the mtDNA analysis, DNA samples, extracted from blood, tissue or nests, of 28 EBN swiftlets from six locations (Sungkai in Perak, Tanah Merah in Kelantan, Kuala Terengganu in Terengganu, Kota Tinggi in Johor, Gua Madai and Pitas in Sabah) were used. The DNA was subjected to PCR amplification of seven mtDNA gene loci, namely *cytb*, *ND2*, *ND3*, *ND5*, *12S rRNA*, *16S rRNA* and *COI*. Sequencing of the amplicon revealed a total of 33 haplotypes across the loci. The *cytb* and *ND2* loci had the highest variation with each exhibiting eight haplotypes. The *12S rRNA*, *16S rRNA*, *COI* and *ND5* loci had five, six, four and five haplotypes, respectively; *ND3* had only one. The Tajima's D showed a negative value for all the loci ( $P > 0.05$ ), while the Fu and Li's D values were negatives for all the loci except *16S rRNA*. Estimates of genetic differentiation for the mtDNA loci did not show any genetic structure within or between the locations. The median joining network (MJN) tree for all the gene loci showed that the EBN swiftlet populations could not be distinguished geographically. The shared haplotypes suggest high gene flow between locations. The mismatch distributions for all loci were multimodal in shape except for the *ND5* locus. The mtDNA loci indicated lack of spatial delineation and the unsuitability of these markers for DNA barcoding. However, the results showed that the overall genetic diversity in the species was relatively high indicating a genetically healthy population. The data obtained from this study will be useful to monitor the effects of swiftlet ranching on the *A. fuciphagus* population and in the management of the genetics of this species.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai  
memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**MORFOMETRI DAN VARIASI GENETIK DALAM MTDNA BURUNG  
WALIT (*AERODRAMUS FUCIPHAGUS THUNBERG*) DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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*A. fuciphagus* (burung walit) secara semula jadi mendiami gua batu kapur di Asia Tenggara, tetapi baru-baru ini penternakan burung walit dalam rumah buatan manusia telah menjadi popular. Burung walit mempunyai kepentingan komersial kerana sarang unik mereka dihasilkan penuh daripada rembesan *mucilaginous* dari kelenjar air liur dan sangat bernilai untuk ciri-ciri pemakanan, afrodisiak dan perubatan. Kerja mengenai genetik burung walit adalah terhad, terutama di Malaysia. Terdapat juga kekurangan pengetahuan mengenai *spatial delineation* spesies burung walit di Malaysia.

Kajian ini telah dijalankan untuk menjelaskan kepelbagaiannya genetik *A. fuciphagus* dengan menganalisis tujuh gen mtDNA (*cytb*, *ND2*, *ND3*, *ND5*, *12S rRNA*, *16S rRNA* dan *COI*), dengan harapan untuk mengenal pasti barcode DNA untuk tujuan kebolehkesanannya sarang burung yang boleh dimakan (EBN). Parameter morfometrik burung tersebut juga dinilai supaya variasi yang diperhatikan di antara lokasi boleh dikaitkan dengan variasi antara penanda molekul.

Untuk kajian morfometrik, 33 burung yang ditangkap berperikemanusiaan dari lima lokasi di Malaysia Barat (Bachok, Kota Bharu dan Tanah Merah di Kelantan, Kuala Terengganu di Terengganu, dan Sungkai di Perak) diukur untuk ketebalan paruh, panjang paruh, panjang ekor, kaki panjang dan panjang sayap. Tidak ada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam ketebalan paruh burung walit dari lima lokasi, manakala perbezaan yang ketara ( $P < 0.05$ ) antara parameter lain diperhatikan di kalangan sesetengah lokasi. Terdapat korelasi yang tidak ketara antara berat badan dan panjang paruh, panjang ekor dan kaki panjang. Secara amnya, terdapat seolah-olahnya tiada corak variasi geografi bagi sifat-sifat morfometrik yang disiasat antara lokasi.

Untuk analisis mtDNA, sampel DNA, yang diekstrak daripada darah, tisu atau sarang, sebanyak 28 burung walit dari enam lokasi (Sungkai di Perak, Tanah Merah di Kelantan, Kuala Terengganu di Terengganu, Kota Tinggi di Johor, Gua Madai dan Pitas di Sabah) telah digunakan. DNA tersebut telah tertakluk kepada amplifikasi PCR tujuh lokus gen mtDNA, iaitu *cytb*, *ND2*, *ND3*, *ND5*, *12S*, *16S* dan *COI*. Urutan amplicon mendedahkan sejumlah 33 haplotip seluruh lokus. Lokus *cytb* dan *ND2* mempunyai variasi yang tertinggi dengan tiap satu mempamerkan lapan haplotip. Lokus *12S rRNA*, *16S rRNA*, *COI* dan *ND5* mempunyai lima, enam, empat dan lima haplotip, masing-masing; *ND3* mempunyai hanya satu. D Tajima menunjukkan nilai negatif untuk semua lokus ( $P > 0.05$ ), manakala nilai D Fu dan Li adalah negatif untuk semua lokus kecuali *16S rRNA*. Anggaran pembezaan genetik untuk lokus mtDNA tidak menunjukkan sebarang struktur genetik dalam atau di antara lokasi. Median joining network (MJN) tree untuk semua lokus gen menunjukkan bahawa populasi burung walit tidak boleh dibezakan dari segi geografi. Haplotaip yang dikongsi mencadangkan aliran gen tinggi antara lokasi. Taburan ketidak sepadanan untuk semua lokus adalah berbentuk *multimodal* kecuali bagi lokus *ND5*. Lokus MtDNA menunjukkan kekurangan *spatial delineation* dan ketidak kesuauian penanda ini untuk barcode DNA. Walau bagaimanapun, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kepelbagaian genetik keseluruhan dalam spesis tersebut agak tinggi menunjukkan populasi yang sihat dari segi genetik. Data yang diperolehi daripada kajian ini akan berguna untuk memantau kesan penternakan burung walit ke atas populasi *A. fuciphagus* di Malaysia dan dalam pengurusan genetik spesis ini.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 7 July 2014 to conduct the final examination of Kolade Oluwaseyi Modupe on her thesis entitled "Morphometry of and Genetic Variation in MTDNA of The Edible Nest Swiftlet (*Aerodramus fuciphagus* Thunberg) in Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

10X	ten times
1X	one time
A	Adenosine
BL	beak length
BT	beak thickness
Bp	base pair
C	cytosine
COI	cytochrome c oxidase 1
<i>Cytb</i>	cytochrome b
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
dNTP	deoxynucleotide triphosphate
EBN	edible bird nest
G	guanosine
GM	Gua Madai
Kb	kilobase
KG	Kota Tinggi
KT	Kuala Terengganu
LL	leg length
M	molar
MgCl <sub>2</sub>	magnesium chloride
mM	milimolar
ND2	NADH dehydrogenase subunit-2
ND3	NADH dehydrogenase subunit-3
ND5	NADH dehydrogenase subunit-5

PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PT	Pitas
RNA	ribonucleic acid
rpm	revolution per minute
SP	Sungkai
T	Thymine
TAE	tris-acetic-EDTA
TM	Tanah Merah
TL	tail length
UV	ultraviolet
W	Watt
WL	wing length
<i>16S rRNA</i>	16s ribosomal RNA
<i>12S rRNA</i>	12s ribosomal RNA

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

There are over 24 echolocating species of swiftlets from the genus *Aerodramus* but only a few produce edible nests of good qualities around the world (Marcone, 2005). The species of swiftlet known to be the highest producers of bird nest traded in the world are the white nest swiftlet (*Aerodramus fuciphagus*) and the Black nest swiftlet (*Aerodramus maximus*). Both species are found in large populations in the East Borneo and Peninsular Malaysia.

*Aerodramus fuciphagus* are small sized insectivorous swifts that inhabit limestone caves of many parts of South East Asia (Chantler *et al.*, 1999; Chantler & Driessens, 2000; Marcone, 2005) and are first class flyers flying at high velocity (Videler *et al.*, 2004). They possess the ability to echolocate, a characteristic shared only by Neotropical oilbird (Steatornithidae) (Suthers & Hector, 1985; Price *et al.*, 2004). In Malaysia they are known as “Burung Walit”. These birds are unique in that they produce nests that are deemed edible and are of commercial importance. This edible nest swiftlet (EBN) builds nests wholly of the mucilaginous secretion from the pair of sublingual salivary glands, intricately constructed without feather, moss or twigs (Marshall & Folley, 2009).

EBNs are highly sought after due to their nutritional, aphrodisiac and medicinal properties (Goh *et al.*, 2001; Sankaran, 2001; Lim, 2002; Guo *et al.*, 2006; Norhayati *et al.*, 2010). Recently, local EBN industries have ventured into providing artificial housing for these swiftlets and producing house EBNs because of the commercial value of the nests. This has increased the number of birds, but may in the long term have an adverse effect on the overall population of swiftlets (Chantler & Driessens, 2000; Sankaran, 2001; Marcone, 2005; Aowphol *et al.*, 2008;). The EBN swiftlet is a unique species and in the attempts to increase their numbers, due consideration has to be given to maintaining the genetic stability of the populations. Due to its ever increasing demand, the survival of the EBN swiftlets lies in a pragmatic approach to the exploitation of its nest (Sankaran, 2001). As such, this highly placed species needs correct management with genetic conservation as one of the priorities for enhancement of the population and the EBN industry.

Population genetic studies of swiftlet are important in both the natural and man-made colonies for continual survival of the species. Genetic diversity data is needed to monitor the genetic variability of species as loss of diversity is a treat to the survival of a population (Frankham, 2003). The advances in molecular techniques and genetic analysis enable utilisation of molecular markers to access pools of genetic variability (Avise, 1994).

Limited works have been done on the EBN swiftlets in Malaysia to date, and consequently, limited literature is available. In addition, few publications are available on the genetics and morphometry makeup of the natural EBN swiftlet populations. There is also no adequate knowledge about the delineation among swiftlet species in Malaysia. These make it difficult to evaluate genetic variation and the effects of the growing industry on the local swiftlet populations. Since the qualities of the EBNs determine the price and the demand, there is also a demand for a traceability system. DNA barcode is ideal for this purpose; if established it may be used to identify origin of a genetic material.

### **1.1 Objectives**

This study was aimed to assess mtDNA genes and elucidate the genetic variability of *A. fuciphagus* in Malaysia.

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. to assess the morphometric variations of the EBN swiftlet populations in Perak, Terengganu and Kelantan.
2. to evaluate the genetic variation among EBN swiftlets from different locations in Malaysia based on seven mtDNA loci.
3. to identify DNA barcodes for EBN swiftlet to facilitate traceability by location.

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