

GOUGING (PLANTS) FOR A LIVING: EXUDATIVORY IN THE BENGAL SLOW LORIS *NYCTICEBUS BENGALENSIS*

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Plant exudates present a challenging diet; rich in energy, but knotted in long chains of polysaccharides, often laced with toxic compounds, and never abundant. Predictably few animals have chosen this diet. When they do, is it as a fallback option in the absence of foods that they really prefer? We estimated the extent of exudativory in *Nycticebus bengalensis* and examined whether exudates can be considered as fallback foods. This study was carried out in Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary, northeastern India, in winter (December, 2007 to February, 2008) and summer (March, 2008 and April, 2008). We estimated time-activity budget using instantaneous sampling and used continuous focal animal sampling to record all instances and durations of feeding, during 177 hours of direct observations. Exudates formed over 85% of the diet, identifying *N. bengalensis* as the most exudativorous loris. In addition to scraping exudates were obtained by gouging holes into plants. In winter lorises almost exclusively fed on exudates (94.3% of winter feeding time). In summer, despite an increase in flowers and fruits, exudates (67.3%) and nectar from one species (22.3%) dominated the diet. Exudates rather than being a staple fallback food seem to be a preferred, patchily distributed and common food in the diet of *N. bengalensis*. Exudativory in this species is characterized by high selectivity among plant species and seasonal variation, which may be related to variations in productivity of exudates and their chemical composition. An understanding of these factors is necessary for predicting the response of this species to human disturbance such as logging.

Keywords: Exudativory in *Nycticebus bengalensis*