

COAT COLOURATION AS A FORM OF CAMOUFLAGE IN A GROUP OF HIGHLY EXUDATIVOROUS PRIMATES (LORISIDAE: NYCTICEBUS)

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Slow lorises (*Nycticebus* sp.) are small nocturnal primates distributed across SE Asia. Coat colouration and extent of dark facial and body markings have proven useful in distinguishing slow loris species, yet the ecological factors selecting for these traits have not yet been examined. *Nycticebus* is one of few primate genera capable of active gouging for plant exudates. Here we present data from four long-term field studies on three of the five species conducted in Seima Biodiversity Conservation Area, Cambodia (*N. pygmaeus*); Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary, Cambodia (*N. bengalensis*); Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, India (*N. bengalensis*); Gunung Halimun-Salak National Park, Java, Indonesia (*N. javanicus*). In all studies, although most commonly animals used multiple small branches on which they could maintain a tight grasp, lorises also used relatively exposed trunks or large diameter branches where grasping was difficult. Essential activities on such substrates included: nose-down foraging for insects, extraction of exudates, and quadrupedal locomotion. The first two activities lasted up to one hour and involved slow or static postures, whereas when travelling on large substrates, animals generally used their most rapid gait. Bark colour patterns of commonly used trees (dead bamboo, *Terminalia*, *Parserianthes*, *Albizia*) corresponded strongly with pelage patterns, with the dorsal stripe resembling a gum lick. Three out of four sites in our sample exhibit a marked cold season where exudates become a vital resource. We propose that coat colour in these taxa represents an anti-predator adaptation, serving as a form of camouflage, when these slow-moving animals forage on potentially vulnerable substrates.

Keywords: slow loris, gummivory, predation, feeding