

STATUS & CONSERVATION OF BENGAL SLOW LORIS *NYCTICEBUS BENGALENSIS* IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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Bengal slow loris (*Nycticebus bengalensis*) is the sole representative of the strepsirrhine primates in North-east India, recently relisted from 'Data Deficient' to 'Vulnerable' by IUCN (2008). Limited information on its status and ecology is the main hindrance to develop any conservation strategy in India. During March 2008 to May 2009, we carried out a detailed study to estimate the population status of Bengal slow loris in some protected areas of Assam (n=15) and Arunachal Pradesh (n=1). Reconnaissance surveys in conjunction with line transect methods were used to estimate loris encounter rates. A team of 3-4 individuals conducted surveys at night (1800 – 0200 h) on foot, detecting lorises visually. We covered 370 km over 99 full and 28 partial nights. We recorded 22 individuals in nine protected areas of Assam and three individuals from Arunachal Pradesh. Average encounter distance of lorises from transects was 15 m and they were seen at average heights of 12 m. The abundance estimate of this species in the surveyed areas was calculated at 0.02 - 0.18 individual/ km, which is relatively low when compared to estimates of slow lorises throughout their range, but significantly higher than the single other recent study conducted in North-east India. Contrary to previous assumption, our study depicts that lorises still persist in suitable habitat, albeit patchily within a forest block. Despite hunting and habitat loss, substantial numbers of slow lorises still exist in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, making the protected area network in these states essential sites for their conservation.

Keywords: Status, Slow loris, *strepsirrhine*, India