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## First record of a clouded leopard predating on a Bengal slow loris

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### Abstract

We present the first photographic record of a mainland clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* predating on a Bengal slow loris *Nycticebus bengalensis* in Dehing Patkai National Park, Assam, India. This finding, made through camera trapping, contributes to our understanding of predatory behavior and diet, highlighting the significance of conservation efforts for both species.

**Keywords:** Diet, *Neofelis nebulosa*, *Nycticebus bengalensis*, predatory behavior

The mainland clouded leopard, a medium-sized felid in the family Pantherinae, is categorized as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN and listed under CITES Appendix I, reflecting threats from poaching and illegal trade (Hearn *et al.*, 2013; Gray *et al.*, 2021). Due to their elusive nature, it becomes difficult to ascertain the preferred prey species of clouded leopards (Nowell & Jackson, 1996). During a camera trapping study to assess the population of clouded leopards in its distribution range in India, a clouded leopard was photo captured carrying a Bengal slow loris (*Nycticebus bengalensis*) held by its nape on a broad forest trail (20:58 hrs; December 07, 2024; 164 m asl) (Figure 1). Earlier, its congener, the Greater slow loris (*Nycticebus coucang*), was recorded as a prey species of the clouded leopard by Grassman Jr. *et al.* (2005) based on scat analysis in Thailand, which was erroneously cited by another study (Rasphone *et al.*, 2022) as Bengal slow loris. The habitat comprised a tropical wet evergreen forest characterized by the dominance of tree species including *Dipterocarpus retusus*, *Mesua ferrea*, and *Dysoxylum gotadhora*, with an approximate canopy cover of 60%. The location is 1.1 km from the nearest tea garden (Tarajan Tea Garden) and 2.5 km from the closest human habitation. In this report, we provide the first photographic evidence of a Bengal slow loris being preyed upon by a mainland clouded leopard, confirming it as a prey species for this felid.

The Bengal slow loris is the only strepsirrhine primate in north-east India and is categorized as 'Endangered' by the IUCN (Nekaris *et al.*, 2020). It exhibits distinct foraging behavior characterized by the repeated use of the same foraging routes and relatively slow locomotion. Among all the species of *Nycticebus*, the Bengal slow loris is the most specialized exudativore, dedicating approximately 86.5% of its total feeding time to consuming plant exudates in arboreal habitats (Swapna *et al.*, 2010). Considering the Bengal slow loris' weight ranges from 850 to 2100 g (Nekaris *et al.*, 2010), and it is arboreal and nocturnal, it is likely that clouded leopards in this area may target this species as relatively easy to hunt prey.

The available literature highlights the diverse range of prey species preferred by clouded leopards, including small and medium sized ungulates, primates, porcupines, pangolins, birds, rodents, and even domestic animals (Davies, 1990; Hazarika, 1996; Nowell & Jackson, 1996; Grassman Jr. *et al.*, 2005; Lam *et al.*, 2014). There is a significant lack of information regarding the preferred prey of the clouded leopard. Therefore, this photographic record fills in the information gap on the prey preference of the clouded leopard in its Indian distribution range.



Figure 1: The clouded leopard predating on a Bengal slow Loris captured on a forest trail (motorable road) in the Soraipung range of the Dehing Patkai National Park, Assam, India

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Dr. Govindhan Veeraswami Gopi is an academic editor, and Dr. Bilal Habib is the managing editor at the Journal of Wildlife Science. However, they did not participate in the peer review process of this article except as authors. The authors declare no other competing interests.

### DATA AVAILABILITY

No additional data was used in this research.

### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Rameshwar Ghade: Writing-Original Draft Preparation (lead), Writing-Review & Editing (equal), Field work (equal). Azam Khan: Writing-Original Draft Preparation (supporting), Writing-Review & Editing (equal), Field work (equal). Tribhuwan Singh: Writing-Original Draft Preparation (supporting), Writing-Review & Editing (equal). Daniel Miranda: Writing-Original Draft Preparation (supporting), Writing-Review & Editing (equal). Bilal Habib: Funding Acquisition (lead), Writing-Original Draft Preparation (supporting), Writing-Review & Editing (lead), Gopi G. V.: Writing-Original Draft Preparation (supporting), Writing-Review & Editing (supporting)

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