HONG KONG: For the first time, researchers in Sabah on the island of Borneo have begun studying the life habits of the Bornean slow loris, a rare primate known for its ability to release toxins through its teeth. It is hoped that the long-term study will reveal new insights into the animal, which is being threatened by illegal pet and ornamental trade in South-East Asia.

Discovered and classified first in 1785, the Bornean slow loris has recently become a rare sight in the jungles of Borneo. Figures of the total population do not exist but wildlife experts expect the density today to be around five animals per square kilometre, a dramatic decline from up to 80 per square kilometre in the 1980s.

The study, which receives funding from the Cleveland Metroparks and Columbus Zoos in the US, aims to find out where the animal sleeps or regularly hunts for prey like insects or lizards. To date, the scientists have only been able to tag one specimen with a collar that has to be replaced every two to three months, Director of the Danau Girang Field Centre in Sabah, Benoit Goossens, said.

“It is very difficult to catch a slow loris as they move high in the canopy,” he told Dental Tribune Asia Pacific. “But we hope to collar more animals as we need a larger sample size to publish our data. It is a poorly-studied species.”

Apart from allergic reactions, the secretion is not hazardous to humans.

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