

Creatures of the Night!

NG KiDS treks into the jungles of Borneo on the search for some incredible nocturnal animals!



"Be careful where you step," says our guide **Sabinus**, as we make the final preparations for our late-night safari in the 26-hectare **Rasa Ria forest reserve** in **Sabah**. Torch? Got it. Night-vision goggles? Yes. Water? Yep, lots of it.

We head off into the hot, humid forest, walking past enormous **fig tree roots** and twisted **lianas vines**. All around us, the nocturnal creatures are beginning to stir...

Sabinus loves life in the forest!

SLOW LORIS

Sabinus scours the trees as we walk quietly through the darkness, our torches lighting the path in front of us. "There are ten **slow lorises** in this jungle, but they can be difficult to spot because they're very shy," he says. "Their **enormous eyes** help them find prey in the dark."

The **27-cm nocturnal primates** feed on **tree gum, insects** and **small animals**, but, unlike monkeys, these primates are *unable* to jump, so they move carefully along the branches **hand over hand**, their **pincer-like fingers and toes** helping them grip the trees.

Lorises may look cute and cuddly but they have a **deadly trick** up their sleeve! "They're the only **venomous mammals** on the planet," Sabinus explains. Glands under their **elbows** secrete toxins, and when the loris **licks** the gland, the venom is transferred into its **mouth**, giving it a **toxic bite**. As the loris licks its **fur**, the toxin is transferred onto its coat, deterring bitey **mosquitoes** and hungry **predators**. Cool!

The name 'loris' comes from an old Dutch word meaning 'clown'!

WESTERN TARSIER

Western tarsiers have **huge eyes** that help them see at night – each eyeball is the same size as their **brain**! "They can **rotate their heads almost 180-degrees** in each direction!" says Sabinus. "This allows them to see all around as they search for insects and small vertebrates to eat." Without having to move, they can stay completely silent as they hunt!

Only **14cm in length**, tarsiers have much longer tails – up to **20cm**. Special **pads** on their **long fingers** help the tiny **primates** grip trees. "They use their **long hind legs** to leap up to **5m** through the branches," Sabinus says. "They're perfectly equipped for life in the dark!"

Tarsiers sleep during the day, but are wide awake at night!



Is it a bear? Is it a cat? No, it's a **binturong**!

BINTURONG

Sabinus stops suddenly as we continue our walk. "Look, up there!" he whispers excitedly, his torch shining briefly into the canopy. A **pair of eyes** flashes back. "That's a **binturong**," he says. "It's also called a **bearcat** because it has a **face like a cat** and a **body like a bear**!"

"It's one of only **two carnivores in the world** that has a **prehensile tail**," Sabinus explains. "It uses it to **grip onto branches** (see left) as it moves about the trees."

We follow the **metre-long** binturong for several minutes as it travels above us. Somehow Sabinus knows where it is, even in the darkness. He sniffs deeply. "When a binturong urinates, it leaves behind a **scent trail** for others to pick up," he says. "The urine smells of **fresh popcorn**." Weird!

NG KIDS visited the **Rasa Ria nature reserve** and **Mengkabong River** courtesy of **Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort & Spa** near **Kota Kinabalu** in **Malaysian Borneo**. Learn more about the hotel and the nature reserve at shangri-la.com/kotakinabalu/rasariareport and rasariareport.com. We flew to Sabah courtesy of **Royal Brunei Airlines**. Find out more at flyroyalbrunei.com. With thanks to sabahtourism.com and borneosandakantours.com for providing the trip to the **Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre** on page 30.

Binturongs have terrific tails!

Some species of firefly can be more than **2cm long**!

Fireflies come in many different sizes and colours!

Fabulous fireflies!

We ride up a jungle river and get up close to some incredible **glowing insects**...

"There are about **2,000 species of firefly** around the world," explains our guide **Fauzi**, as we cruise slowly up Borneo's **Mengkabong River**. "But these insects are not flies – they're actually **beetles**! In Malaysia, we call them '**kelip kelip**', which means '**twinkle twinkle**!' They're like fairies!"

It's 9pm, and it's so dark on the river's backwaters that it's almost impossible to distinguish the water from the **mangrove forest**. Our boat gently comes to a stop, 10m from the riverbank. Fauzi briefly **flashes his torch** into the trees. Almost instantly, the **mangrove lights up** like a Christmas tree! Then the flashing lights start moving towards the boat! "I was pretending to be a **female firefly**," Fauzi explains.

"The insects flying over the water towards us are male. Fireflies' light is produced by **special chemicals** in their **abdomen**. It's how they communicate. Each species is attracted to a different colour of light."

One of the beetles lands in his hands and we take a look at the incredible creature (left). It's tiny, just **6mm long**. Fauzi releases the insect and we sit, in total darkness, watching the **sparkling light display** erupt in the forest around us. It's a magical experience.

Who knew something so tiny could be so beautiful?!

Pictures: Sabinus, Fauzi and firefly close-up © Tim Herbert, Tarsier and slow loris (both) © Getty Images UK. Binturong and fireflies lit up © Nature Picture Library.