SINGAPORE — A picture on Facebook was all a group of National University of Singapore (NUS) students had as they began efforts to find the carcass belonging to a rare species of monkey.

The photograph was of a banded leaf monkey — there are only about 40 of these animals here — which had apparently been killed in a road accident. The students were alerted to the photograph by their lecturer and locating the carcass would have enabled them to retrieve its DNA for research.

After initial attempts to get a cleaning services contractor to find the carcass turned up short, Ms Andie Ang, 26, and five other graduate students rushed at night to the accident site along Upper Thomson Road.

They combed the area, using the light from their mobile phones. But, alas, the carcass could not be found. Said Ms Ang: “Motorists must have been wondering what we were doing — walking up and down the road with our mobile phones. We could have done more with a carcass ... taken measurements, examined its bones. So, we did the next best thing — look for blood.”

After an hour of searching, a team member spotted a scratch on the road similar to the one in the photograph posted online.

Ms Amrita Srivathsan, 22, a member of the team, said: “As we were digging, a pebble came loose and we found some liquid blood underneath.”

The challenge, however, was retrieving the DNA from the sample.

Said Ms Ang: “As the blood was two to three days old, it could have degraded or have been contaminated by bacteria or the weather. Moreover, whole blood contains only a tiny amount of DNA, let alone impure samples of blood.” But after two weeks of numerous trials in the lab, they finally succeeded.

The recovery yielded important genetic markers which the team will use to compare with other DNA obtained from faecal samples.

For instance, a low genetic variation indicates a high degree of in-breeding, thus an increased probability of extinction.

Lauding the students’ efforts, Nature Society Singapore president Shawn Lum said such DNA studies should be extended to all animal and plant species here, as it would go towards restoring the “viability and sustainability” of Singapore’s biodiversity.

“It’s a miracle we found a usable blood sample,” Ms Ang said.