

Observation of Fruit-feeding by Sunda Scimitar-Babbler

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Introduction

Frugivory (fruit feeding) by the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus bornensis* is not documented in our region. Wells (2007) describes invertebrates and small vertebrates in its diet and states that "*McClure (1966) thought visitors to a canopy-cropping Ficus sumatrana were taking fruit but the greater likelihood is that they were after insects themselves attracted to the crop*".

Collar and Robson (2022a) list "*ginger seeds, flower pods, fruit, and berries*" in the diet of the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler but the entire food list is identical to that of the Javan Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus montanus* (Collar & Robson 2022b). The Sunda Scimitar-Babbler and Javan Scimitar-Babbler were split in the Clements Checklist 2022 update. The Birds of the World accounts were split accordingly but it is uncertain if the details on fruit in the diet belong to observations of the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler or the Javan Scimitar-Babbler.

I describe a fruit feeding episode by the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler.

Observation

On the morning of 04 May 2026, I was birding near the entrance of Kenyalang Loop at Gunung Mulu National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia. I observed a Sunda Scimitar-Babbler actively feeding on a hanging cluster of small green fruits, approximately the size of black peppercorns (identity of the plant uncertain). The bird repeatedly selected, plucked, and swallowed the fruits over several minutes (Plate 1). I was able to observe the full feeding sequence and saw the bird reaching for and consuming multiple fruits.



Plate 1: Fruit feeding by the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler. Gunung Mulu National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia, May 2026.

During the observation, I did not observe it searching for or feeding on insects or other invertebrates. The feeding appeared intentional, with the bird moving methodically along the fruiting vine before eventually leaving the area.

Discussion

As far as I am aware, the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler is generally described as feeding mainly on insects and other small invertebrates. This observation suggests that fruit is also consumed, at least opportunistically, although I cannot comment on how common this behaviour may be.

A review of the Macaulay Library for the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler (as of 02 August 2026) using the "foraging or eating", "feeding young" and "carrying food" tags did not show any frugivory episodes. An online image search for "Sunda Scimitar-Babbler" and "fruit" also did not reveal any fruit feeding documentation.

Corlett (2017) explicitly notes that babblers, though "*commonly described as insectivores, but every study that has looked at fecal samples or observed understory trees and shrubs has reported consistent levels of frugivory*".

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References

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