

# Nectariniidae: Recognize subspecies *Cinnyris frenatus saleyerensis* (Hartert, 1897)

Sahul Sunbird *Cinnyris frenatus*: [Birds of the World account](#)

Sahul Sunbird comprises four subspecies (*frenatus*, *plateni*, *robustirostris* and *flavigastra*), and has only recently been recognised as a species, due to the 8-species carve-up of what was formerly known as Olive-backed Sunbird (Eaton et al 2016) (AviList v1, 2025) [#865].

Of the currently recognised subspecies, some are delineated on the basis of very minor differences, for example, "Subspecies *frenatus* male differs from *flavigastra* in having more extensive metallic gloss on breast in most individuals, and has more obvious yellow moustachial stripe." (Cheke et al 2023), whereas *robustirostris* is described as similar to nominate 'but longer-billed' (Eaton et al 2016). Given the minor differences between currently recognized subspecies, it seems surprising that *saleyerensis* has been lost in recent times, and is hereby discussed and proposed to be resurrected.

*Hartert, E. (1897)* [see below for full excerpt]

***Cinnyris frenata meyeri* subsp. nov.**

in honour of Dr. A. B. Meyer.

No. 2 is *C. frenata plateni* (W. Blas.), sensu strictiore.

No. 3, if different from No. 2, is *C. frenata dissentiens* Hart.

*C.f. meyeri* is the nearest form of the three to *G. frenata frenata*.

To make matters still more interesting, though more complicated again, I am enabled, with my good series of Bonthain birds for comparison, to state that the difference between the latter and those from Saleyer, viz. the still paler underside of the Saleyer form, is well marked and apparently constant, and therefore I cannot hesitate any longer to distinguish it as

***Cinnyris frenata saleyerensis* subsp. nov.**

*Cinnyris* formae *C. frenata dissentiens dictae* persimilis, sed subtns valde pallidior. (=but underneath I am much paler.).

*Cinnyris frenata dissentiens* Hartert.—Both sexes and pulli from the lower hills up to 6000 feet. "Iris deep brown: feet and beak black."

After once more reading Professor Blasius' discussion on "*Cyrtostomus frenatus* (S. Müll.) var. nov. *Plateni*" in *Zeitschr. f. ges. Ornith.* II. pp. 289-291, and comparing the figures on Plate XII. with my birds from Bonthain Peak, it became to me very doubtful whether it would be possible to separate the form of the Bonthain Peak from that of Makassar. When I named my *dissentiens* I compared it with a good series of North Celebes specimens, which were named by Dr. A. B. Meyer, who no doubt has of all ornithologists the greatest knowledge of the Celebesian avifauna, *C. frenata plateni*. So it came that I took them to be typical *plateni*, nor had I any special reason to doubt the correctness of this view, as Professor Blasius had bestowed the name *plateni* on southern as well as on northern examples. Professor Blasius now has been kind enough to lend me his type of *C. frenata plateni*, which, as his article clearly shows, is the South Celebes bird, with which, however, he united the North Celebes birds, although stating some slight differences. I find now, from a study of Blasius' type and one *male* from Makassar in the British Museum, that the Makassar birds are quite unlike the Minahasan form, being much paler yellow below, and more olive with very little of a green tinge above. Nevertheless they are not exactly like our birds from Bonthain Peak, but still a little darker below, and with a slight greenish tinge above, while my Bonthain form has *none at all*. Therefore it would be most desirable to compare a series of Makassar birds with those from Bonthain, of which I have a good material before me now, to finally decide whether the Bonthain birds are constantly different from those of Makassar: but at present I must suppose, and I believe that this will be found to be quite right, that there are three forms in Celebes:—

- (1) A bird with dark yellow under parts and greenish upperside, inhabiting Northern Celebes.
- (2) A bird with paler underside, darker olive-brown and much less greenish upperside, found in the low country in South Celebes.
- (3) A bird with still paler underside and still less greenish deep olive-brown upperside, known to occur on the Bonthain Peak.

The first of these three, which is *undoubtedly* different from No. 2, has no name, and I wish to name it

***Cinnyris frenata meyeri* subsp. nov.**

in honour of Dr. A. B. Meyer.

No. 2 is *C. frenata plateni* (W. Blas.), sensu strictiore.

No. 3, if different from No. 2, is *C. frenata dissentiens* Hart.

*C.f. meyeri* is the nearest form of the three to *C. frenata frenata*.

To make matters still more interesting, though more complicated again, I am enabled, with my good series of Bonthain birds for comparison, to state that the difference between the latter and those from Saleyer, viz. the still paler underside of the Saleyer form, is well marked and apparently constant, and therefore I cannot hesitate any longer to distinguish it as

***Cinnyris frenata saleyerensis* subsp. nov.**

*Cinnyris* formae *C. frenata dissentiens dictae* persimilis, sed subtns valde pallidior.

*Hab.* Insula Saleyer dicta.

Typus in Museo Rothschildiano asservatur.

Figure 1: Extract from Hartert, E. (1897)



On a return visit to Selayar, October 2025, further 20 individuals were encountered, all showed the same pale lemon underparts as described by Hartert (1897).

No noticeable differences were noted in the vocalisations between *C. f. saleyerensis* and *C. f. plateni*.



*C. f. saleyerensis*

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/556005481>



*C. f. saleyerensis*

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/643582311>

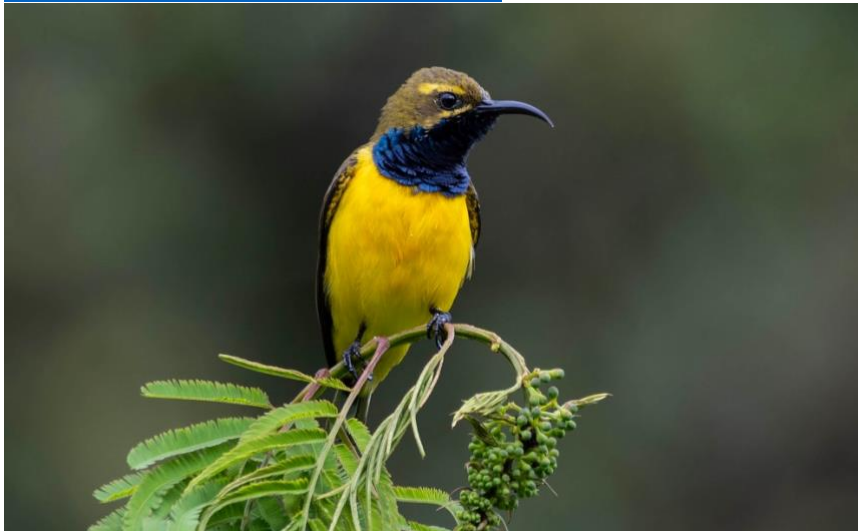


*C. f. saleyerensis*: <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/628125218>



*C. f. plateni* (North Sulawesi)

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/621771790>



*C. f. plateni* (North Sulawesi)

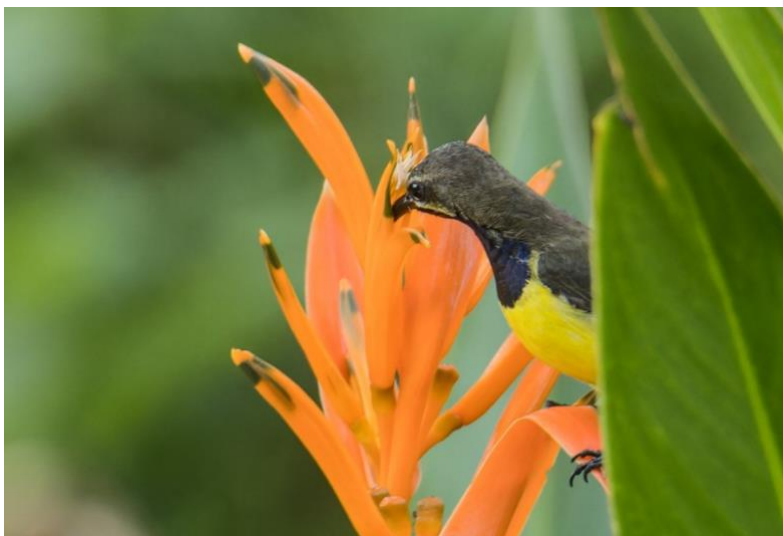
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/632596271>

A whole series of other photographs of *C. f. plateni* can be viewed here:

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/636857785>

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/642354102>

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/643873673>



*C. f. plateni* – in southernmost Sulawesi, closest landmass to Selayar.

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/644258421>



*C. f. plateni* – in southernmost Sulawesi, closest landmass to Selayar.  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/378044441>



*C. f. plateni* – in southernmost Sulawesi, closest landmass to Selayar.  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/635438446>



Series of *Cinnyris frenatus plateni*. From left to right: G. Klabat (North Sulawesi), Sidera (Central Sulawesi), Sidrap (South Sulawesi), Selayar. Photo: M. Irham.

Note the obviously paler, lemon-yellow underparts of the Selayar specimen.

### Conclusion

Based on specimens and field observations from throughout much of mainland Sulawesi and surrounding islands, we conclude that Selayar birds show consistently paler, lemon-yellow underparts compared to elsewhere in the range of *Cinnyris frenatus plateni*. Additionally, we note that other subspecies of Sahul Sunbird are recognized on the basis of relatively minor plumage or morphological characteristics. Therefore, Tropical Asian RAG recommends that *saleyerensis* (Hartert 1897) should be resurrected as a valid taxon, and a subspecies of Sahul Sunbird *Cinnyris frenatus saleyerensis* following Eaton et al (2021).

### References

[Cheke, R., C. Mann, G. M. Kirwan, and D. A. Christie \(2023\). Sahul Sunbird \(\*Cinnyris frenatus\*\), version 1.0. In \*Birds of the World\* \(B. K. Keeney and S. M. Billerman, Editors\). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA.](#)

Eaton, J.A., Van Balen, B., Brickle, N.W. and Rheindt, F.E., 2016. *Birds of the Indonesian Archipelago. Greater Sundas and Wallacea*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain.

Eaton, J.A., Van Balen, B., Brickle, N.W. and Rheindt, F.E., 2021. *Birds of the Indonesian Archipelago. Greater Sundas and Wallacea*. 2nd Edition. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain.

[Eaton, J.A. and Rheindt, F.E., 2017. New avifaunal records from the Flores Sea islands, Indonesia, including a novel \*Phylloscopus\* leaf warbler. \*BirdingASIA\*, 28, pp.97-106.](#)

[Hartert, E. \(1897\) Mr William Doherty's bird-collections from Celebes. \*Novit. Zool.\* 4: 153-166.](#)

White, C.M.N. and Bruce, M.D., 1986. *The birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas & Lesser Sunda Islands, Indonesia): An annotated check-list*. London: British Ornithologists' Union.