IRENA PUELLA.

Indian Fairy Bluebird.

Fairy Roller, Latham, Gen. Synopsis, Suppl. p. 87.

Coracias puella, Lath. Ind. Orn. p. 171.—Daudin, Traité, ii. p. 264.

Irena puella, Jerdon, Madras Journal, xiii. p. 262.—Mc Clell. Proc. Zool. Soc. 1839, p. 160.—Gray, Gen. Birds, i. p. 288, pl. 70. fig. 3 (1847).—Horsf. & Moore, Cat. of Birds Mus. E.I. Co. p. 273 (1854).—Jerdon, B. India, ii. p. 105 (1863).—Gray, Hand-l. Birds, i. p. 288 (1869).—Stoliczka, Journ. As. Soc. Beng. xxxix. pt. 2, p. 318 (1870).—Wald. Ibis, 1871, p. 170.—Holdsw. Proc. Zool. Soc. 1872, p. 452.—Wald. Ibis, 1873, p. 306.—Armstrong, Stray Feathers, 1876, p. 326.—Sharpe, Cat. Birds Brit. Mus. iii. p. 268 (1877).—Fairbank, Str. F. 1877, p. 406.—Hume & Davison, Stray Feathers, 1878, pp. 328, 516.—Hume, Str. F. 1879, p. 99.—Legge, Birds of Ceylon, p. 466 (1880).—Sharpe, Cat. Birds Brit. Mus. vi. p. 177 (1881).

Irena indica, A. Hay, in Blyth's Report, Journ. As. Soc. Beng. xv. p. 309 (1846).—Bonap. Consp. i. p. 349 (1850).

This is the best-known of all the Fairy Bluebirds; and, in giving several illustrations of the different species of the genus *Irena*, I have been desirous of illustrating one of the most interesting and peculiar forms of Asiatic bird-life. The systematic position of the genus *Irena* has been one that has puzzled a good many naturalists; and it has been variously placed in the families Dicruridæ and Brachypodidæ. Mr. Bowdler Sharpe placed the genus among the Dicruridæ in the third volume of the 'Catalogue of Birds;' but, recognizing his mistake, he has lately, in his sixth volume, republished the descriptions, and classified the genus with the Bulbuls. To this conclusion he was led by the arguments used by the late Marquis of Tweeddale, in his critique on the third volume of the 'Catalogue of Birds;' and I do not think I can do better than reproduce some of the observations made by his Lordship on that occasion.

"*Irena*. The true systematic position of this genus has divided the opinions of ornithologists ever since Horsfield founded it. Temminck first classed it among the Dicruridæ; and so have other authors since, and Mr. Sharpe does the same. Jerdon placed it (following Blyth) among the short-legged Thrushes, and made it constitute a separate subfamily, Ireninæ, the third among the Brachypodidæ, arranging it between the Phyllornithinæ and the Oriolinæ. In Jerdon's view I must undoubtedly concur. The affinity between *Irena* and *Dicrurus* is more apparent than real; it is an affinity of mimicry at best. The contour of the bill has a superficial resemblance; but the margins of the commissure are inflected in *Irena*; in *Dicrurus* they are spreading. In the last the rictal bristles are developed (a certain indication of insectivorous habits); in *Irena* they are short, weak, almost absorbed. In the gradation of the quills there is some analogy; but in *Irena*, the 3rd, 4th, and 5th are usually equal and longest, whereas in *Dicrurus* the 3rd is generally shorter than the 4th and 5th. Beyond these points all resemblance ceases. The tarsus and feet are short and weak in *Irena*; the toes and nails are singularly slender for the size of the body; and the outer toe is free, whereas in *Dicrurus* it is ankylosed up to the first joint. The tail consists of twelve rectrices, and not of ten; and this character of itself removes *Irena* from the Dicruridæ, according to Mr. Sharpe's own definition. The plumage is of a totally different character. The skin in *Irena* is especially tender; in *Dicrurus* it is exceedingly tough. In *Dicrurus* the sexes wear the same plumage, even the ornate plumes; in *Irena* the male has a brilliant and the female a sombre attire. Every species of *Irena* has a number of fine nuchal hairs, which are wanting in *Dicrurus*. This last character (unknown to Blyth and Jerdon), together with the short and weak feet, indicates a great affinity to *Criniger*. The *Dicruri* are insectivorous, some even killing small birds, whereas *Irena* is frugivorous. The structure of the sternum in *Dicrurus* is, I believe, different from that of *Irena*. The notes of *Irena* are those of *Oriolus*, and have no similarity to those of *Dicrurus*."

The Indian Fairy Bluebird is found in the forests of Southern India. Jerdon states it is far from uncommon in the lofty jungles of Malabar, and he also met with it in forests near Palghautcherry, Trichoor, the Wynaad, and on the Coonoor Ghât as high as 4000 feet and upwards; it is also found in Travancore, in the Neilgherri Mountains, and the Palani Hills, ranging as high as 4000 feet in the latter locality according to Dr. Fairbank, who also met with it in the Sawant-wade woods in the Khandala district. It is very rare in Ceylon, having only been known to occur in that island on three occasions, twice near Kandy, and once near Saffragam. Although it has been said to have been met with near Sehwan, in Scinde, Mr. Hume has pointed out that it was in all probability a caged specimen which had been killed, as this locality is so far out of the bird's range that it is scarcely possible for it to have occurred in a wild state. It is not known from any part of the Himalayas until Sikkim is reached; but eastwards from that country it occurs