

# MEROPOGON FORSTENI.

## Forsten's Bee-eater.

- Merops Forsteni*, Temm. in Mus. Lugd.—Schl. De Dierk., fig. at p. 53.—Idem, Mus. des Pays-Bas. *Merops*, sp. 8.  
—Meyer, Journ. für Orn., 1871, p. 231.
- Meropogon Forsteni*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom. i. p. 164.—Wall. Ibis, 1860, p. 142.—Wald. Trans. Zool. Soc., vol. viii. pp. 42, 111.
- Nyctiornis (Meropogon) Forsteni*, G. R. Gray, Hand-list of Birds, part i. p. 98.

For many years a single specimen of this showy and fine Bee-eater graced the Museum at Leyden, and remained the only individual that had reached Europe, until Dr. Meyer recently rediscovered it and added additional specimens to our collections. That it should have escaped the researches of Mr. Wallace, whose perseverance as a collector has been unequalled by any traveller who has braved the dangers of the islands of the Eastern Archipelago and New Guinea, is very surprising, the more so as, to use his own words, he had set his heart upon obtaining it. Much credit, therefore, is due to Dr. Meyer for supplying us with additional examples, and for giving us a few brief details respecting its habits, which will be found below, quoted from the 'Journal für Ornithologie' for 1871.

A difference of opinion has arisen among ornithologists as to the propriety of separating this bird from the genus *Merops* and making it the type of a new one. Some would place it with *Nyctiornis*: but Lord Walden has clearly shown that it possesses characters not found in that genus nor in *Merops*; and I for one quite agree with the late Prince Charles L. Bonaparte and his Lordship in generically separating it from both. Lord Walden's remarks (comprised in his very valuable memoir on the birds known to inhabit the Island of Celebes, published in 1872, in the eighth volume of the 'Transactions of the Zoological Society of London') are as follows:—

"This species has the first primary half the length of the second, which is a little shorter than the third. The third and fourth are longest, and equal. The fifth is somewhat shorter than the third and fourth, but longer than the second. In the structure of the wing, therefore, it differs from both *Merops* and *Melittophagus*, but agrees with *Nyctiornis*. The grooved culmen of *Nyctiornis* is not present; but a shallow channel extends from the base of the maxilla, on both sides of the culmen, for two thirds of its length. This character is not possessed by either *Nyctiornis*, *Merops*, or *Melittophagus*. The rectrices are truncated, as in *Nyctiornis*; but the middle pair are elongated, as in *Merops*, and closely resemble in form and proportion those of *M. philippensis*. The feet are those of the family. The elongated pectoral plumes resemble in character the same feathers in *Nyctiornis*. Altogether *M. Forsteni* may be regarded as a link uniting *Nyctiornis* to *Merops*, but most nearly allied to *Nyctiornis*."

Lord Walden remarks in addition that "the African species which most nearly resembles *M. Forsteni* in the graduation of the quills and the formation of the rectrices, the middle pair excepted, is *M. bullockoides*, Smith."

"In the year 1840," says Dr. Meyer, "Forsten found at Tondano, in Northern Celebes, a bird which Schlegel subsequently described as *Merops Forsteni*. The single specimen which arrived at Leyden was the only one that had then reached Europe; and this beautiful bird remained for a long time a desideratum to ornithologists from its rarity, and especially on account of its resemblance to another species, from Western Africa. The authorities at Leyden gave themselves no end of trouble in endeavouring to obtain additional specimens, Rosenberg remaining on the spot where the first was found for a considerable time with that especial object, but all in vain. I have now at last succeeded in killing several males and females in the neighbourhood of Rurukan, where Wallace had established a collecting-station. In a state of nature the bird keeps in deep, hardly accessible woods, perches on the highest trees, and has all the habits of the *Meropidae*. It is by no means rare, but difficult to find, owing to its retreating into the thick woods. To the natives it is unknown; and it was only after many vain endeavours that I succeeded in obtaining the specimens above mentioned."

The sexes, which are alike in colouring, may be thus described:—

The lengthened feathers of the crown, cheeks, throat, and breast rich deep blue; upper surface of the body, wings, and upper tail-coverts deep grass-green; two centre tail-feathers a somewhat richer green, tinged with blue towards their tips; lateral tail-feathers deep chestnut-red, narrowly edged throughout their entire length with grass-green; back of the neck dark brown; abdomen green, suffused with brown on the vent and under tail-coverts; bill black; irides crimson; feet slate-colour.

The figure is of the natural size.