

HELIANTHEA TYPICA.

Star-frontlet.

Ornismya helianthea, Less. Rev. Zool. 1838, p. 314.

Mellisuga helianthea, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 112, *Mellisuga*, sp. 6.

Helianthea typica, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., p. 74, *Helianthea*, sp. 1.—Ib. Consp. Troch. in Rev. et Mag. de Zool. 1854, p. 251.

I BELIEVE the honour of first describing this fine species is due to M. Lesson, who gave it the name of *helianthea*, in the "Revue Zoologique" for 1838. In France it is known by the trivial appellation of "*Fils du Soleil*," and in Bogota by that of "*La Esmeralda*." During the last twenty years, or from the date when the species first came under the notice of ornithologists to the present time, many thousand examples have fallen before the blow-pipe of the Columbian Indians, who, having been supplied with preservative preparations and taught how to skin them, visit the native retreat of the bird when its plumage is in the finest condition, kill and prepare vast numbers, and afterwards sell them to the European residents in the city of Bogota, who again either transmit them to London or Paris, or convert them into ornaments of various kinds; hence it is that this species is so common in all our collections. If this wholesale destruction was generally practised, the total extirpation of this fine species would be the inevitable consequence; but such a result is fortunately obviated by the great range the bird enjoys, extending to five or six degrees on each side of Bogota, which appears to be the centre of the area. I may here mention that Pamplona specimens are rather larger and generally of a darker hue than those from the neighbourhood of Bogota; I do not, however, regard them otherwise than as local varieties. Mr. Mark, Her Majesty's Consul at Bogota, informs me that the bird is there known by the name of "*La Esmeralda*," from the mark over the forehead; that one of its favourite haunts is the Paramos or desert district behind the city, at an elevation of from nine to ten thousand feet; and that it is exceedingly numerous there when the wild guava, a shrubby plant covering considerable tracts, is in flower.

The female, though less beautiful and differing greatly in the style and markings of her plumage, has many varied and sparkling tints on the lower part of the back and upper tail-coverts, which, glowing with a metallic lustre, defy the skill of the artist to depict them.

The male has: on the forehead a spot of luminous metallic green; lores, crown of the head and occiput velvety black; back, wing-coverts, sides of the neck, throat and breast velvety black, glossed with bronzy green; in the centre of the throat a small gorget-like mark of deep shining blue; wings very dark purplish brown; upper tail-coverts dark iridescent metallic purplish green; abdomen rich deep metallic lilaceous crimson; under tail-coverts deep maroon, glossed and tipped with purple; tail very dark olive; bill black.

In Pamplona specimens the abdomen is of a deeper hue and has a tinge of dark green; the under tail-coverts are of a still deeper maroon, and largely tipped with iridescent metallic bluish green.

The female has the head, shoulders, wing-coverts and sides of the neck bronzy green, deepening into coppery bronze on the lower part of the back; rump and upper tail-coverts as in the male, but with a more olive tinge; centre of the throat deep buff; abdominal feathers deep buff, tipped with metallic crimson; vent and under tail-coverts buff, the latter with bronzy centres.

The Plate represents two males and a female of the natural size; the plant is the *Epidendrum aurantiacum*.