

AVOCETTULA RECURVIROSTRIS.

Fiery-tailed Avocet.

- Trochilus recurvirostris*, Swains. Zool. Ill., vol. ii. pl. 105.—Jard. Nat. Lib. Humming Birds, vol. i. p. 80. pl. 3.
- Mellisuga? recurvirostris*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiv. p. 248.
- Ornismya recurvirostris*, Less. Hist. Nat. des Ois. Mou., p. 129. pl. 37.—Ib. Supp., p. 166. pl. 34.—Ib. Traité d'Orn., p. 284.
- Campylopterus recurvirostris*, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 330.
- Hylocharis recurvirostris*, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 114, *Hylocharis*, sp. 11.
- Curve-billed Humming Bird*, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. iv. p. 358.
- Avocettinus recurvirostris*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., p. 75, *Avocettinus*, sp. 1.
- Avocettula recurvirostris*, Bonap. Rev. et Mag. de Zool. 1854, p. 256.—Reichenb. Aufz. der Colibris, p. 6.—Ib. Troch. enumer., p. 3. pl. DCLXXIX. figs. 4485–4489.
- Ornismya avocetta*, Less. Supp. Hist. Nat. des Ois. Mou., p. 145. pl. 24.—Ib. Les Troch., p. 74. pl. 23.—Jard. Nat. Lib. Humming Birds, vol. i. p. 78. pl. 2.
- Avocettinus lessoni*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., p. 75, *Avocettinus*, sp. 2.

THE earliest record of the existence of this interesting bird will be found in the second volume of Swainson's "Zoological Illustrations," where a unique specimen, purchased by him at the sale of Bullock's celebrated Collection, is figured and described. He states that Bullock had received it from Peru; but all the specimens that have come under my notice have been collected in Cayenne and Demerara, and these, with the immediately adjoining countries, constitute, I believe, its true habitat: this may not, however, be the limit of its range, and it is possible that it may visit the distant country of Peru, but I think it very unlikely that it does, and apprehend that Bullock must have been misinformed as to the locality in which his specimens were procured. In the absence of any positive information respecting the habits and economy of this species, or the peculiar adaptation of its singularly-formed bill, Swainson has ventured upon the following hypothesis, which I repeat, without being able to verify or deny it in any particular:—

"The extraordinary formation in the bill of this beautiful little creature is without parallel in any land-bird yet discovered, and presents in miniature a striking resemblance to that of the Avocet. It is almost impossible to conjecture rightly the use of this singular formation; but it appears to me not very improbable, that the principal sustenance of the bird may be drawn from the pendent *Bignoniæ*, and other similar plants, so common in South America, whose corollæ are long, and generally bent in their tube: the nectar being at the bottom, could not be readily reached either by a straight or incurved bill, though very easily by one corresponding to the shape of the flower."

At least three very distinct states of plumage characterize this species. In the fully adult, the green breast and the fiery under surface of the outer tail-feathers are the conspicuous features. In younger males, even after the bird has acquired the green on the throat, the tail is greenish or purplish black, with the three outer feathers tipped with white. In the females or young of the year (it is uncertain which), the throat and centre of the abdomen are black, bounded on either side by a streak of white; in this state, too, the outer tail-feathers are tipped with white.

I may remark that the *Avocettula recurvirostris* is by no means a common bird in the collections of Europe,