

## AGLÆACTIS CUPRIPENNIS.

### Shining Sun-beam.

*Trochilus cupripennis*, Bourc. et Muls. Rev. Zool. 1843, p. 71.—Ann. de la Soc. Sci. de Lyons, 1843, p. 46.

*Mellisuga cupripennis*, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 112, *Mellisuga*, sp. 25, & vol. iii. App. p. 5. App. to p. 112.

*Aglæactis cupripennis*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., p. 73, *Aglæactis*, sp. 1.—Reichenb. Aufz. der Colibris, p. 9.

——— *cupreipennis*, Bonap. Rev. et Mag. de Zool. 1854, p. 253.

*Helianthea cupripennis*, Reichenb. Troch. enumer., p. 6. pl. DCCXXXVII. figs. 4689, 4690.

UNDOUBTEDLY the greatest living naturalist of the age is Baron Humboldt: in calling this eminent man a naturalist, let it not be supposed that I wish in any way to detract from his other even higher qualifications of a geognosist, a linguist, and a clear-sighted politician; but to the appellation of a great naturalist he is clearly entitled by virtue of his "Aspects of Nature,"—a work which will live long after this Nestor of science has quitted the world about which he has so ably written. Now it so happens, that those parts of the vast Andean ranges so prolific in beautiful Humming Birds, form the theme of the work above alluded to, and the subject of many passages in his "Personal Narrative" and his "Cosmos." Humboldt could not, therefore, have failed to observe the bird here represented, as well as many other equally rare and beautiful species; yet, strange to say, not one was collected by him, nor for nearly thirty years after his return were Trochilidists aware of the existence of these lovely Andean birds. Humboldt was the scientific pioneer who opened up these fine regions, but, his mind being attracted to higher objects, he did not direct his attention to the birds, though he must have seen them. The path once trodden, and the way to these vast ranges of mountains shown, collectors were soon upon the track and reaped a rich harvest in every department of natural history, but in none more than in ornithology. The native countries of this fine species are Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru, particularly their temperate regions, where civilized man is naturally tempted to roam, and where the bird, from its large size and glittering colour, must be an object of great attraction and interest. Although but a few years have elapsed since its discovery, it has now become very common, and is to be found in every collection. It has always been a great favourite with myself, and doubtless its light brown colouring and the lovely hues of its glittering back have rendered it equally charming to others.

It forms a typical example of the genus *Aglæactis*, the members of which are all remarkable for the lengthened plumes which spring from the chest, and for the rich hues which adorn the back not being perceptible until the bird is viewed from behind, or reversely to the direction of the feathers.

The sexes are very similar in general appearance, but the female is at once distinguished by the entire absence of the fine colours on the back, which form so conspicuous a feature in the opposite sex.

The Trochilidæ are known to evince a decided partiality for the flowers of certain trees and shrubs; they do not, however, confine themselves to these exclusively, but occasionally pay their devoirs to any that may be in bloom: in this way the various species of *Cactus*, as well as other plants of more humble pretensions, are visited by them: but it must not be concluded, that because I have figured this species on the *Cereus MacDonaldiæ*, it is more frequently resorted to than any of the numerous other fine flowers which occur in its native wilds; it is more likely that it is only one of those which it occasionally visits.

The male has the head and nape, and the back when viewed in the direction of the feathers, of a velvety