

CALOTHORAX CYANOPOGON.

Mexican Star.

Cynanthus Lucifer, Swains. in Phil. Mag. 1827, p. 442 ?

Ornismya cyanopogon, Less. Hist. Nat. des Ois. Mou., p. 50. pl. 5.—Ib. Supp. à l'Hist. Nat. des Ois. Mou., pp. 117, 119. pls. 9, 10.—Ib. Traité d'Orn., p. 274.—Ib. Ind. Gen. et Syn. des Ois. du Gen. *Trochilus*, p. xxiii.

Calothorax lucifer, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 110, *Calothorax*, sp. 10.—Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., p. 85, *Calothorax*, sp. 1.

Trochilus cyanopogon, Jard. Nat. Lib. Humming-Birds, vol. ii. pl. 14.

——— *lucifer*, Jard. Nat. Lib. Humming-Birds, vol. ii. p. 79.

Lucifer cyanopogon, Reich. Aufz. der Col., p. 13.—Bonap. Rev. et Mag. de Zool. 1854, p. 257.

Trochilus simplex, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 291 ?—Ib. Hist. Nat. des Col., p. 86. pl. 23 ?

THIS beautiful species, so well known by its trivial name of "Mexican Star," is a denizen of the table-lands of that rich country Xalapa, the land of perpetual spring and of an unsurpassed climate. It was in this fine region that the bird came under the observation of the late Mr. Bullock, to whom we are indebted for all that is known respecting it, and which is comprised in the following extracts from his "Six Months in Mexico":—

"The house I resided in at Xalapa for several weeks was only one story high, enclosing, like most of the Spanish houses, a small garden in the centre, the roof projecting six or seven feet from the walls, covering a walk all round, and leaving a small space only between the tiles and the trees which grew in the centre. From the edges of these tiles to the branches of the trees in the garden, the spiders had spread their innumerable webs so closely and compactly that they resembled a net. I have frequently watched, with much amusement, the cautious peregrination of the Humming-Bird, who, advancing beneath the web, entered the various labyrinths and cells in search of entangled flies; but as the larger spiders did not tamely surrender their booty, the invader was often compelled to retreat: being within a few feet, I could observe all their evolutions with great precision. The active little bird generally passed once or twice round the court, as if to reconnoitre his ground, and commenced his attack by going carefully under the nets of the wily insect, and seizing by surprise the smallest entangled flies, or those that were most feeble. In ascending the angular traps of the spider, great care and skill was required; sometimes he had scarcely room for his little wings to perform their office, and the least deviation would have entangled him in the complex machinery of the web, and involved him in ruin. It was only the works of the smaller spider that he durst attack, as the larger sort rose to the defence of their citadels, when the besieger would shoot off like a sunbeam, and could only be traced by the luminous glow of his refulgent colours. The bird generally spent about ten minutes in this predatory excursion, and then alighted on a branch of the *Avocata* to rest and refresh himself, placing his crimson star-like breast to the sun, which then presented all the glowing fire of the ruby, and surpassed in lustre the diadem of monarchs. Europeans who have seen only the stuffed remains of these little feathered gems in museums have been charmed with their beautiful appearance; but those who have examined them whilst living, displaying their moving crests, throats and tails, like the Peacock, in the sun, can never look with pleasure on their mutilated forms. I have carefully preserved about two hundred specimens, in the best possible manner, yet they are still but the shadow of what they were in real life. The reason is obvious; for the sides of the laminae, or fibres of each feather, being of a different colour from the surface, will change when seen in a front or oblique direction; and as each lamina or fibre turns upon the axis of the quill, the least motion, when living, causes the feathers to change suddenly to the most opposite hues. Thus the one from Nootka Sound changes its expanded throat from the most vivid fire-colour to light green; the Topaz-throated does the same, and the Mexican Star changes from bright crimson to blue.

"The sexes vary greatly in their plumage, so much so that the male and female could not have been known had they not been seen constantly together, and proved to be so by dissection. They breed in Mexico in June and July; and the nest is a beautiful specimen of the architectural talent of these birds: it is neatly constructed with cotton or the down of thistles, to which is fastened on the outside, by some glutinous substance, a white, flat lichen resembling ours.

"The female lays two eggs, perfectly white, and large for the size of the bird; and the Indians informed me they were hatched in three weeks by the male and female sitting alternately. When attending their young, they attack any bird indiscriminately that approaches the nest. Their motions when under the influence of anger or fear are very violent, and their flight rapid as an arrow—the eye cannot follow them;