

CALYPTE HELENÆ.

Helena's Calypste.

Orthorhynchus Helenæ, Lembeye, Aves de l'Isle de Cuba, p. 70. pl. x. fig. 2.

————— *Boothi*, Gundlach, MS.

I HAVE always considered this diminutive but truly beautiful Humming Bird to be one of the gems of my collection, which contains an example of each sex, both of which bear the appearance of being fully adult. The species is a native of the Island of Cuba; and, strange to say, while I can readily obtain examples of many species from the remote forests of the interior of Bolivia and Peru, I have entirely failed in my attempts to procure specimens of the present bird from an island comparatively near to us, and the natural productions of which are so much better known. Besides the two examples possessed by myself, I believe that another has been sent to Bremen by Dr. Gundlach, for I find among my papers a drawing of the male, kindly sent to me a few years since by Dr. Hartlaub: in this drawing the tail-feathers are narrowly tipped with black,—a character I do not find in my birds; but as the latter are slightly imperfect, it is just possible my illustration may not be quite correct in this point; at the same time I would remark, that the black mark above mentioned may be nothing more than the deep shade which appears at the tip of the tail-feathers when the bird is viewed in one position.

For the first discovery of this little gem we are certainly indebted to Señor Don Juan Gundlach, Professor of Philosophy at Cardénos in the island of Cuba, who in his MSS. assigned to it the specific name of *Boothi*, which name he would wish to be retained,—the term *Helenæ*, by which it is known to ornithologists from the figure and description in Lembeye's "Aves de l'Isle de Cuba," having been previously given to another member of the family; as, however, the two *Helenas* belong to two very distinct genera, I have considered it best to follow all previous writers and keep the name assigned to it by Lembeye, that being the one first published.

All that we know of the habits and economy of this little *rara avis minutissima* of the Island of Cuba is contained in the following passage, literally translated from the work of Lembeye above referred to:—

"I have had the pleasure of seeing and killing this bird, in the company of Dr. Gundlach, who, on our return from this agreeable expedition, related to me the observations he had made about it. The *Zunzuncito*, he says, unites to its beauty a varied song—well-sustained, and rather powerful considering its diminutive body—somewhat resembling that of the Cabrero (*Spindalis pretrii*). It enjoys this faculty before it attains the brilliant plumage of the adult. Its flight resembles that of the Colibri (*Trochilus colubris*), and as both these species have a very short tail, they cannot execute such rapid evolutions as the *T. Riccordi*. Sometimes I have seen them fight, rising perpendicularly to a considerable height, and then returning to the point of departure to commence their song anew. They may be distinguished when they fly by the complete silence they keep—only the monotonous humming of their wings being heard; while the *Riccordi*, under the same circumstances, emits a shrill cry, and the *colubris* a sweet and weak voice resembling the syllables *cric cric*."

I cannot close this paper without recording, as I do with much pleasure, my obligations to Frederick Taylor, Esq., of Liverpool, who, with the greatest liberality, presented to me the only two examples of this species I have yet seen: I consider myself the more indebted to this gentleman, as although himself a collector of the Trochilidæ, he most readily parted with them to still further enrich a collection finer than his own.

The male has the head, ear-coverts, throat, and pendent plumes on the sides of the neck, of the richest metallic crimson; all the upper surface and wing-coverts greenish blue; wings purplish brown; under surface white, with the exception of the flanks, which are greenish blue; tail deep rich greenish blue, becoming darker at the tip.

The female has the head, upper part of the back and wing-coverts green; lower part of the back bluish green; wings purplish brown; central tail-feathers dark blue, the lateral feathers blue at the base, then deep black and tipped with white; under surface white, except the flanks which are washed with green.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size. The plant is the *Ceanothus Lobbianus*.