

## MICROCHERA ALBOCORONATA.

Snow-cap.

*Mellisuga albo-coronata*, Laur. Ann. Lye. New York, vol. vii. 1855, p. 137. pl. iv.

IN figuring this little Humming-bird I have the pleasing task of bringing before the notice of my readers one of the most singular species of the family that has been discovered for many years, and of recording my acknowledgements to a most liberal and highly scientific gentleman of the western world. It is to Mr. George N. Laurence of New York, then, that my thanks are due, not only for the gift of the only example of this new bird that graces my collection, but for much kindness and attention during my visit to America. Independently of an intimate acquaintance with other ornithological groups, Mr. Laurence is an excellent Trochilidist, and possesses one of the finest collections of the *Trochilidæ* out of Europe.

On instituting an examination and comparison of this bird with the other forms of the family, I at once perceived that it differed in its characters from every one of them, and, consequently, that it was necessary to constitute it the type of a new genus, and with the kind assistance of P. L. Slater, Esq., I have instituted that of *Microchera* for its reception.

The following extract from Mr. Laurence's paper on this species, published in the "Annals of the Lyceum of New York" as above quoted, comprises all that is at present known respecting it:—

"In form comparatively short and stout; bill straight and slender, the nostrils hid by the frontal feathers; the wings extend a little beyond the tail, which is slightly rounded; outside of tarsi clothed for half their length with hair-like feathers; the hind toe as long as the outer one.

"*Adult*.—Front and crown silky white, forming a flattened crest, projecting over the sides of the head, the feathers of which (although not lustrous) have the scale-like form of metallic ones; all the upper and under plumage is of a glossy blue-black, having on the neck and upper surface metallic reflections of cupreous red, most conspicuous on the lower part of the back; wings purplish black; wing-coverts slightly bronzed with green; on the chin is a small tuft of feathers, diverging on each side, of a dull green, fringed with white; the two central tail-feathers are deep purple, the others are white at the base for two-thirds of their length on the lateral feathers, increasing to three-quarters on the others, with a terminal band of bluish black edged with white; the outer margins of the outside tail-feathers are black; the upper tail-coverts have crimson-purple reflexions, the lower are white; in the dried specimen the upper mandible is black, the lower brownish yellow; the feathers on the tarsi are brown, terminating with white; tarsi and upper surface of feet brown, underneath the feet are yellow.

"*Young*.—Two specimens of young birds have the white crest-feathers appearing next the bill and along the edges of the crown, the centre of the crown being dull metallic green; the black of the under surface is intermixed with white; the upper plumage is green, with crimson reflexions on the rump; the tail is marked the same as in the adult, except in being more tipped with white.

"Length,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches; bill,  $\frac{1}{2}$ ; wing,  $1\frac{5}{8}$ ; tail,  $\frac{7}{8}$ . The young do not differ much in size from the adult.

"*Habitat*.—Veraguas, New Grenada.

"At first view the full-plumaged bird has the appearance of being only black and white, as the metallic reflexions are not very observable except on examination.

"It is a very small species, and, as far as I have been able to ascertain, is unique among its kindred in having the crown entirely white.

"The specimens were presented to me by Dr. J. K. Merrit, who has furnished, in the note which is given below, a very interesting account of their habits.

"It was in the autumn of 1852, while stationed in the district of Belen, Veraguas, New Grenada, that I obtained several specimens of this diminutive variety of the Humming-bird family.

"The first one I saw was perched on a twig pluming its feathers. I was doubtful for a few moments whether so small an object could be a bird, but upon close examination I convinced myself of the fact and secured it. Another I encountered while bathing, and for a time I watched its movements before shooting it; the little creature would poise itself about three feet or so above the surface of the water, and then as quick as thought dart downwards, so as to dip its miniature head in the placid pool; then up again to its original position, quite as quickly as it had descended.

"These movements of darting up and down it would repeat in rapid succession, which produced not a moderate disturbance of the surface of the water for such a diminutive creature. After a considerable number of dippings, it alighted on a twig near at hand, and commenced pluming its feathers."

The Plate represents a male and a female of the size of life. The plant is the *Dichorisandra picta*.