

INTRODUCTION.

THE questions have often been asked, whence is the term Humming-Bird derived, and why is the bird so called. I may state in reply that, owing to the rapid movement of the wings of most of the members of this group, but especially of the smaller species, a vibratory or humming sound is produced while the bird is in the air, which may be heard at the distance of several yards, and that it is from this circumstance that the trivial name by which these birds are known in England has arisen. In France they are recognized by the terms *Oiseau-mouche* and *Colibri*; in Germany their common appellation is *Kolibri*; by the Dutch they are called *Kolibrielje*; by the Spaniards *Pica flores* and *Tomino*; by the Portuguese *Tomeneco* and *Beija-flor*; in the neighbourhood of Xalapa they are known by the names of *Chupa-rosa* and *Chupa-myrt*, Rose-sucker and Myrtle-sucker; by the Creoles of the Antilles and Guiana they are known by the names of *Murmures*, *Bourdons*, and *Frou-frous*. From the Mexicans, Peruvians, and other nations of South America they have received various appellations, such as *Ourissia*, *huitzitzil*, *tzitztototl*, *guanumbi*, *quinti* or *quintiut*, *quindé*, *visicilin*, *pigda*, and *courbiri*,—all terms of a metaphorical character, signifying “rays of the sun,” “tresses of the day-star,” “murmuring birds,” &c.

Linnaeus applied to the whole of the species known to him the generic appellation of *Trochilus* (a name given by the ancients to some fabulous little bird), whence is derived the family designation TROCHILIDÆ. By Brisson, a contemporary of Linnaeus, the terms *Polytmus* and *Mellisuga* were proposed; but with respect to some of the thirty-six species described by him, as well as by the older writers such as Seba, Marcgrave, Willughby, Ray, &c., it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine what they really were. We may, however, fairly commence our investigations with a greater chance of accuracy from the date when the great Swedish naturalist commenced his labours. By him twenty-two species were enumerated in the twelfth edition of his ‘Systema Naturæ.’ In Gmelin’s, or the thirteenth edition, the list is increased to sixty-seven. Of these I have determined about two-thirds; the remainder must for ever continue involved in mystery, and their names be erased from our scientific works—the descriptions being extremely meagre, and the synonyms occasionally referring to figures of very different species. In some instances, even, the species are attributed to countries where Humming-Birds are never found; while in others, such as that of the Harlequin Humming-Bird, the characters are taken from a plate which must have been drawn from imagination and not from any real specimen. These are a few of the difficulties which a naturalist has to encounter when access to the types cannot be obtained. I think it necessary to make this statement