

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Edouard TRAVIES (Doullens 1809 - Paris 1876)

A Long-Tailed Hermit Hummingbird (*Phaethornis superciliosus*), a Crimson Topaz Hummingbird (*Topaza pella*), and a Green-Throated or a Black-Throated Mango Hummingbird (*Anthracothorax viridigula* or *Anthracothorax nigricollis*)

Watercolour, pen and brown ink and wash, with framing lines in pencil.

Signed and dated Edouard Trabies pt. 1835. in the lower margin.

170 x 100 cm. (6 3/4 x 4 in.)

Previously identified as a long-tailed sylph hummingbird, the bird depicted at the top of the sheet appears to be a long-tailed hermit hummingbird, which inhabit the forest undergrowth of Venezuela, the Guianas and northeastern Brazil. Both males and females of the species share a similar brown plumage, although females tend to be slightly smaller in size. The breeding season of the long-tailed hermit hummingbird is quite long, lasting from December or January all the way through to August or September, depending upon the flowering of their preferred feeding plants. In order to find a mate, males sing in communal leks - groups of dozens of males gathered to engage in competitive displays of courtship - and wiggle their long tails until the females choose the best singer as a partner.

Found in a number of countries across northern South America, the crimson topaz hummingbird lives in the upper and middle canopy of lowland forests, up to around five hundred metres of elevation. They are a sexually dimorphic species - one in which males and females exhibit distinct characteristics from one another - which is most notable in their varied plumage and size. Males are larger and their colouring changes from beak to tail, with a deep crimson purple back, while their bellies and breasts are a vibrant orange-red and their throats are an iridescent green. By contrast, the females are smaller - being just slightly longer than the length of the male's tail feathers, between thirteen and fourteen centimetres - and they have mostly green plumage with orange outer tail feathers.

The final bird depicted has previously been identified as a green-throated mango hummingbird, but it is equally possible that the bird is a black-throated mango hummingbird. Both species are native to South America and thrive in similar habitats. The plumage of the males and females sharply contrast one another; males are a mixture of iridescent blues and greens, whereas females are green and have white chests with a stripe down their middles. The difficulty of properly identifying the bird in the present sheet is caused by the fact that, based on its colouring, this particular hummingbird is a female, and the plumage of female green-throated and black-throated mango hummingbirds are so inseparably close that it is nearly impossible to tell them apart.

Literature:

Achille Richard, *Oeuvres complètes de Buffon*, Paris, 1838, Vol. XIX.

Artist description:

Among the finest natural history draughtsmen of the 19th century in France, Edouard Traviès de Villers was a gifted watercolourist and illustrator, and exhibited at the Paris Salons between 1831 and 1866.

Best known for his ornithological watercolours, his activity in this field culminated in seventy-nine magnificent illustrations for his book *Les oiseaux les plus remarquables par leurs formes et leurs couleurs*, published in Paris and London in 1857. Traviès also illustrated other works of natural history, such as *Types du règne animal: Buffon en estampes*; a work intended for children that appeared in 1864. Traviès was further known for his paintings and watercolours of dead game, depicted hanging from a nail on a wall in a sort of trompe-l'oeil effect; indeed, he was one of the first 19th century French artists to develop this theme, which had been established in the previous century by such artists as Jean-Baptiste Oudry.

These watercolours by Edouard Traviès were once part of the exceptional collection of French ornithological watercolours of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries assembled in the 1920s and 1930s by the French industrialist and bibliophile Marcel Jeanson (1885-1942). Several of these watercolours were used to illustrate Achille Richard's *Oeuvres complètes de Buffon*, published in Paris in 1834, 1838 and 1845.