over 100 species of small birds, but when or by whom it was first applied is uncertain. Most of them are remark­able for their gaudy plumage, and, though those known to the older naturalists were for a long while referred to the genus *Certhia* (Tree-creeper, *q.v.)* or some other group, they are now fully recognized as forming a valid Family *Nectariniidæ,* from the name *Nectarinia* invented in 1811 by Illiger. They inhabit the Ethiopian, Indian, and Aus­tralian Regions,@@1 and, with some notable exceptions, the species mostly have but a limited range. They are con­sidered to have their nearest allies in the *Meliphagidæ (cf.* Honey-eater, vol. xii. p. 139) and the members of the genus Zosterops ; but their relations to the last require further investigation. Some of them are called “ Humming-birds ” by Anglo-Indians and colonists, but with that group, which, as before indicated (Hum­ming-bird, vol. xii. p. 357), belongs to the *Picamεe,* the Sun-birds, being true *Passeres,* have nothing to do. Though part of the plumage in many Sun-birds gleams with metallic lustre, they owe much of their beauty to feathers which are not lustrous, though yet almost as vivid,@@2 and the most wonderful combination of the brightest colours—scarlet, purple, blue, green, and yellow—is often seen in one and the same bird. One group, however, is dull in hue, and but for the presence in some of its mem­bers of yellow or flame-coloured precostal tufts, which are very characteristic of the Family, might at first sight be thought not to belong here. Graceful in form and active in motion, Sun-birds flit from flower to flower, feeding chiefly on small insects which are attracted by the nectar ; but this is always done while perched, and never on the wing as is the habit of Humming-birds. The extensible tongue, though practically serving the same end in both groups, is essentially different in its quasi-tubular structure, and there is also considerable difference between this organ in the *Nectariniidae* and the *Meliphagidæ*.@@3 The nests of the Sun-birds, domed with a penthouse porch, and pensile from the end of a bough or leaf, are very neatly built. The eggs are generally three in number, of a dull white covered with confluent specks of greenish grey.

The *Nectariniidae* form the subject of a sumptuous *Monograph* by Capt. Shelley (4to, London, 1876-1880), in the coloured plates of which full justice is done to the varied beauties which these gloriously arrayed little beings display, while, almost every available source of information having been consulted and the results embodied, the text leaves little to be desired, and of course supersedes all that had before been published about them. This author divides the Family into three subfamilies :—*Neodrepaninæ,* consisting of a single genus and species peculiar to Mada­gascar; *Nectariniinæ,* containing 9 genera, one of which, *Cinnyris,* has more than half the number of species in the whole group ; and *Arachnotherinæ* (sometimes known as “ Spider-hunters ”), with 2 genera including 11 species— all large in size and plain in hue. To these he also adds the genus *Promerops*,@@4 composed of 2 species of South- African birds, of very different appearance, and the affinity of which to the rest can as yet hardly be taken as proved. According to Mr Layard, the habits of the Cape Promerops, its mode of nidification, and the character of its eggs are very unlike those of the ordinary *Nectariniidæ.* In the

British Museum *Catalogue of Birds* (vol. ix. pp. 1-126, and 291) Dr Gadow has more recently treated of this Family, reducing the number of both genera and species, though adding a new genus discovered since the publication of Capt. Shelley’s work. (a. n.)

SUN-BITTERN, otherwise the Caurâle,@@5 the *Eury- pyga helias* of ornithology, a bird that has long exer­cised systematists and one whose proper place can scarcely yet be said to have been determined to every­body’s satisfaction.

According to Pallas, who in 1781 gave (*N*. *nördl. Beyträge,* ii. pp. 48-54, pl. 3) a good description and fair figure of it, calling it the “Snrinamische Sonnenreyger,” *Ardea helias,* the first author to notice this form was Fermin, whose account of it, under the name of “ Sonnenvogel,” was published at Amsterdam in 1759 *(Descr., &c*., *de Surinam,* ii. p. 192), but was vague and meagre. In 1772, however, it was satisfactorily figured and described in Rozier’s *Observations sur la Physique,* &c. (v. pt. 1, p. 212, pl. 1), as the *Petit Paon des roseaux—*by which name it was known in Cayenne.@@6 A

few years later D’Aubenton figured it in his well-known series *(Pl. Enl.,* 782), and then in 1781 came Buffon (*H*. *N., Oiseaux,* viii. pp. 169, 170, pl. xiv.), who, calling it “Le Caurâle ou petit Paon des roses,” announced it as hitherto undescribed, and placed it among the Rails. In the same year appeared the above-cited paper by Pallas, who, notwithstanding his remote abode, was better informed as to its history than his great contemporary, whose ignorance, real or affected, of his fellow-countryman’s priority in the field is inexplicable ; and it must have been by inadvertence that, writing “roses” for “roseaux,” Buffon turned the colonial name from one that had a good meaning into nonsense. In 1783 Boddaert, equally ignorant of what Pallas had done, called it *Scolopax solans,@@*7 and in referring it to that genus he was followed by Latham *(Synopsis,* iii. p. 156), by whom it was introduced to English readers as the “ Caurale Snipe.” Thus within a dozen years this bird was referred to three perfectly distinct genera, and in those days genera meant much more than they do now. Not until 1811 was it recognized as forming a genus of its own. This was done by Illiger, whose appellation *Buryρyga* has been generally accepted.

The Sun-Bittern is about as big as a small Curlew, but with much shorter legs and a rather slender, slightly decurved bill, blunt at the tip. The wings are moderate, broad, and rounded, the tail rather long and broad. The head is black with a white stripe over and another under each eye, the chin and throat being also white. The rest of the plumage is not to be described in a limited space otherwise than generally, being variegated with black, brown, chest­nut, bay, buff, grey, and white—so mottled, speckled, and belted

@@@1 One species occurs in Baluchistan, which is perhaps outside of the Indian Region, but the fact of its being found there may be a reason for including that country within the Region, just as the presence of another species in the Jordan valley induces zoographers to regard the Ghór as an outlier of the Ethiopian Region.

@@@2 *Cf.* Gadow, *Proc. Zool. Society,* 1882, pp. 409-421, pls. xxvii. xxviii.

@@@3 *Cf.* Gadow, *Proc. Zool. Society,* 1883, pp. 62-69, pl. xvi.

@@@4 According to Brisson *(Ornithologie,* ii. p. 460), this name was the invention of Reaumur. It seems to have become Anglicized.

@@@5 A name, says Buffon, intended to mean *Râle à queue,* that is, a tailed Rail.

@@@6 This figure and description were repeated in the later issue of this work in 1777 (i. pp. 679-681, pl. 1).

@@@7 Possibly he saw in the bird’s variegated plumage a resemblance to the Painted Snipes, *Rhynchæa.* His specific name shows that he must have known how the Dutch in Surinam called it.