

## Stamp Collecting Parrot Fashion.

Like a number of postage stamp collectors (philatelists) these days, I started collecting when young, stopped when studies and work took over, then returned to the hobby after a long break. This return was brought on by finding my parents' collections and then looking back at my own stamps which I kept.

My collection consisted of two Great Britain albums from the first Penny Black stamp of 1840 up to about 1985 (with numerous gaps), a couple of international albums with stamps from around the world (with even more gaps) and thematic stamps featuring mostly horses, dogs and a few cats.

Since forming these collections I'd developed an interest in ornithology and when I went to my first stamp fair about five years ago and explored stamps online I was drawn to bird stamps. I quickly realised that to collect all bird stamps would be a huge undertaking. According to the collecting website [www.colnect.co.uk](http://www.colnect.co.uk), there are currently (March 2020) over 40,000 postage stamps worldwide that depict birds and this number is growing all the time.

I then noticed that some of the most attractive and colourful stamps featured parrots. These reminded me of Pedro, a yellow-crowned amazon parrot (*Amazona ochrocephala*) that belonged to my parents a number of years ago. An example of this bird can be seen in the 2002 stamp from the Suriname series of Parrot stamps (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Yellow-crowned Amazon.

I decided to concentrate on parrot stamps (although I still fill in the gaps in my other albums). Would collecting all the parrot stamps be feasible? Well, it might be. There are over 350 species of parrots and at the moment there are over 2,000 parrot stamps, with new issues appearing all the time. I have nearly 600 stamps, so I have a way to go.

The next consideration was how to organise the stamps. At first, I decided to arrange the stamps in order of country and then issue date. In 1985, Afghanistan issued a miniature sheet with two Rose-ringing Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) (Figure 2). These birds might be familiar to some as there are several feral populations in Northern Europe including the South East of England.



Figure 2: Rose-ringed Parakeets.

I then started to read the guidelines for exhibiting thematic stamps. One of these is that the theme should extend across a wide period of time. I had seen mostly modern parrot stamps. Were there any early issues? Indeed there were. The first postage stamp that featured parrots was the 1897 dark violet from Tonga. The image was of a Maroon Shining-parrot (*Prosopeia tabuensis*) (Figure 3). Tonga used this design again in 1923 (Figure 4) and in 1942 (Figure 5). The watermarks are the main way to distinguish the 1897 and 1942 issues. The parrot was introduced to Tonga in prehistoric times.



Figure 3: 1897 Maroon Shining-parrot (Turtles watermark).



Figure 4: 1923 Overprint Issue



Figure 5: 1942 Issue (Multiple Crown and Script CA watermark).

Then I began to read about how parrots are arranged according to their biological groups. According to Wikipedia, parrots belong to the order *Psitticiformes* (Figure 6) and they are placed in a tree diagram to show how they are related to other birds and then how all the parrots are related to one another. This concept provided me with, not only a way of organising the stamps, but a story for one of my first stamp displays.



Figure 6: Amazon Parrots

The order *Psitticiformes* is divided into three superfamilies. The oldest superfamily is the New Zealand Parrots (*Strigopoidea*). This group evolved about 60 mya (million years ago). They include the Kakapo (*Strigops habroptilus*) (Figure 7), the Kea (*Nestor notabilis*) (Figure 8), the Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) (Figure 9) and the extinct Norfolk Kaka (*Nestor productus*) (Figure 10).



Figure 7: Kakapo



Figure 8: Kea



Figure 9: Kaka



Figure 10: Norfolk Kaka

The second superfamily to evolve was the Cockatoos (*Cacatuoidea*) about 50 mya. The most familiar of these are probably the Cockatiel (*Nymphicus hollandicus*) (Figure 11) and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) (Figure 12).



Figure 11: Cockatiel



Figure 12: Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

The third superfamily is that of the True Parrots (*Psittacoidea*). They diversified about 40 mya to form the largest of the three superfamilies and includes the African Grey () (Figure 13), Amazons like Pedro (Figure 1 above), Macaws (Figure 14), Parakeets and Budgerigars (Figure 15) and Lovebirds (Figure 16).



Figure 13: African Greys



Figure 14: Blue Macaws



Figure 15: Parakeets and Budgerigars



Figure 16: Black-collared Lovebird.

So now a lot of my stamp displays are essays about parrots which I find a good way to stimulate my mind now I have retired. I feel more like a zoologist and a philatelist these days.