

The Quintessential Quetzal



No.2 The Flying Quetzals

The Definitive Airmails of the 1930's

Introduction

You will all probably be familiar with these stamps. They are the long, thin ones with elegant pictorial scenes of Guatemala and a green coloured Quetzal overprinted in one corner. They are charmingly designed and in my view a wonderful addition to any collection, whether it is thematic or country focused. While they are not particularly complex, indeed, far from it, there are a lot of them and they can be extremely challenging to actually collect.

These are lovely stamps - see Figure 1 below as an example - and this piece is intended as more of a tour of the various series and what they offer rather than a dissection an analysis. I always call them The Flying Quetzals. So, let's take off.



Fig.1 - 1935 50c "EXTERIOR" issue

Background Outline

Many tend to view this series as being issued in two blocks - in 1935 and then again in 1939. The SG Simplified certainly lumps them in this way, but it is misleading. There was a distinct airmail series in 1937 of course, but that one substituted an aircraft for the Quetzal. So we will ignore that one. Of course.

All the series - four principal ones - were printed to a high standard. Initially, there was a large one in 1935, but then followed by a modest supplementary one in 1936 and then a further and slightly larger supplementary series in 1937. These were mono-coloured. Then finally in 1939 another large and dual coloured series was issued. You might confuse the first three with each other, but you wouldn't with the last major one.

There are some overprints as well, including a couple in the early 1940's, but I will deal with those last. It's time to walk you, or rather fly you through each series.

The 1935 Airmail Definitives

Whilst designed by Carlos Marckwordt in Guatemala, the definitive airmails of 1935 were printed photogravure by Enschede in the Netherlands. At the foot of each stamp you will see the words, "C MARCKWORDT" on one side and "JOHEZ" (for Johan Enschede & Sons) on the other side. Quite distinctive.

They were printed in sheets of 100 (10x10) on white wove paper with a clear gum and perforated 12.6. As far as I am aware, there are no perforation variations to look out for. The official issue date is given as 12th October 1935.

The flying Quetzals are in fact an overprint added by Enschede - also in photogravure - and printed in dark green on all issues irrespective of the value colour. It seems to work, even on the 6c light green. However, why it was undertaken in this way is a mystery as there was no requirement to indicate that these were airmail stamps by placing a flying Quetzal over the image. See figures 2 and 3 for comparisons, but note that they are always positioned on the right hand side of the scene, although there are examples of them having moved slightly further into the picture.



Fig.2 - 1935 2c Chestnut



Fig.3 - 1935 6c Light green

The series is split into two types - airmails for internal use, marked "INTERIOR" and those for abroad, marked, "EXTERIOR." This pattern of usage was to be repeated in all the other series that followed. In addition, there are differences in sizes for these types. The Interior issues are slightly larger at 37x17mm, while the Exterior ones come at 34x15mm.

The distinction between "Interior" and "Exterior" stamps was, to quote Goodman, "to facilitate postal book keeping." Originally there had been a requirement that the post should bear stamps that were necessary for the air rates. Effectively it meant a postal tax stamp with regular stamps to cover the basic surface rate and the actual air stamps. This requirement was to later become redundant.

Each depicts a Guatemalan scene or landscape and, for this first series at least each scene is different. To save space, Tables 1 and 2 below provides further details of each issue and the scenes depicted.

Table.1 - 1935 Definitive Airmails (INTERIOR)

SG	Value	Colour*	Scene	Print-run
298	2c	Chestnut	View of Lake Amatitlan	325,000
299	3c	Blue	View of Puerto Barrios	75,000
300	4c	Dark Grey	Ruins of San Felipe fortress	300,000
301	6c	Light green	A different view of Lake Amatitlan	75,000
302	10c	Rose claret	Port of Livingston scene	25,000
303	15c	Red orange	View of port of San Jose	15,000
304	30c	Yellow olive	View of San Pablo la Laguna	5,000
305	50c	Rose violet	Aurora airport, Guatemala City	3,000
306	1q	Vermilion	A further view of Lake Amatitlan	3,000

* Colour descriptions are from Scott catalogue

Total Print run = 826,000

Table.2 - 1935 Definitive Airmails (EXTERIOR)

SG	Value	Colour*	Scene	Print-run
307	1c	Orange brown	View of Guatemala C.A.	150,000
308	2c	Red	Central Park, Guatemala C.A.	100,000
309	3c	Bright purple	Carmen Hill, Guatemala C.A.	50,000
310	5c	Blue	Barrios Plaza, Guatemala C.A.	100,000
311	10c	Chestnut	Los Proceres monument, Guatemala	50,000
312	15c	Scarlet rose	Central Park, Antigua	300,000
313	20c	Violet blue	View of Quetzaltenango	12,500

314	25c	Grey black	View of ruins at Antigua	10,000
315	30c	Green	Puerto Barrios pier	25,000
316	50c	Carmine red	Another view of San Jose	5,000
317	1q	Blue	Different view of Aurora airport	3,000

* Colour descriptions are from Scott catalogue

Total Print run = 805,500

From these tables, it can be seen that the total print-run for both types comes to 1,631,500. This was to represent a little under 20% of all the stamps issued through all the flying Quetzal series.

Note how small some of the printed quantities are. I understand that overall the quantities were believed to be adequate for a two year period, but that nevertheless some values were still available for sale ten years later. It is fairly certain that the large array of values was with an eye towards the philatelic market and that indeed this applied to the other series as well.

I am speculating, but given that some of the small print-run denominations are not exceptionally hard to find nor particularly unaffordable that these were mainly for philatelic dealer and not the general public. That said, you will be unlikely to find some values on cover and if you seek blocks of stamps, well, forget it!

There are no significant errors in this series to look for. However, some of the 50c Carmine red "Exterior" issue have been recorded missing the "T" in "MARCKWORDT."

Supplementary Issues of 1936

On 1st October, 1936 a further seven stamps were issued - two "Interior" and five "Exterior." Perforation, paper and gum details were unchanged. Both the 50c and 1q also retained the same designs as their original counterparts as the 1935 plates were used, although now with different colours. With one exception, all the values are high. Indeed, included in this issue are two new high values, a 2,50q and a 5q, but this time with dual colours and larger in size at 46x30mm. Details of all the issues are provided in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table.3 - 1936 Supplementary Airmails (INTERIOR)

SG	Value	Colour*	Scene	Print-run
305a	50c	Prussian blue	Aurora airport, Guatemala City	6,000
306a	1q	Vermilion	A further view of Lake Amatitlan	6,000

* Colour descriptions are from Scott catalogue

Total Print run = 12,000

Table.4 - 1936 Supplementary Airmails (EXTERIOR)

SG	Value	Colour*	Scene	Print-run
309a	4c	Yellow orange	Mouth of Dulce river	10,000
316a	50c	Violet	Another view of San Jose	6,000
318	1q	Deep green	Different view of Aurora airport	6,000
319	2q50c	Scarlet rose & Olive	Atlantic coastal island	10,000
320	5q	Yellow orange & Prussian blue	Rock formations	10,000

* Colour descriptions are from Scott catalogue

Total Print run = 42,000

There are some errors to seek here. Firstly, the 50c violet has the "T" missing from "MARCKWORDT," but don't become excited if you have one for it's on all copies of this value. Much more significant is finding a copy of the 5q without the flying Quetzal. This has been described by the ISGC as one of the major Guatemalan errors and, I quote, "a great rarity." It is thought that there are only about 20 copies of this error, but fakes with the Quetzal chemically removed are not unknown.

Generally speaking, covers with the higher values are difficult to find. But again, whilst noting the low print-run numbers, obtaining issues do not seem to be overly challenging.



Fig. 5 - 1936 5q Orange & Prussian blue (with Quetzal!)

Supplementary Issues of 1937

These were issued on the 1st January 1937 and again, all the technical details pertinent to the 1935 series, including an “Interior”/”Exterior” split still apply. The main difference is that this time, with only one exception, Guatemala recycled the same pictorial designs found in either the original series or the 1936 supplementary issues. Perhaps due to the lower values, all the 1937 supplementary stamps are single colour. Again these can be detailed as per Tables 5 and 6 below.

Table.5 - 1937 Supplementary Airmails (INTERIOR)

SG	Value	Colour*	Scene	Print-run
300a	4c	Bright blue	Ruins of San Felipe	480,000
301a	6c	Black violet	View of Lake Amatitlan	55,000
303a	15c	Yellow green	San Jose scene	10,000
304a	30c	Olive brown	Lake Atitlan	25,000

* Colour descriptions are from Scott catalogue

Total Print run = 570,000

Table.6 - 1937 Supplementary Airmails (EXTERIOR)

SG	Value	Colour*	Scene	Print-run
309b	4c	Claret rose	River Dulce estuary	15,000
310a	5c	Yellow orange	Plaza Barrios	300,000
311a	10c	Olive green	National Liberation monument	80,000
312a	15c	Vermilion	New - view of Dulce river	480,000
313a	20c	Deep claret	View of Quetzaltenango	50,000
314a	25c	Green	Antigua scene	50,000
315a	30c	Scarlet rose	Puerto Barrios	100,000

* Colour descriptions are from Scott catalogue

Total Print run = 1,075,000

This is quite an interesting set. In contrast to the 1936 supplementary series there are more but lower values whilst broadly replicating many in the 1935 issue. And then note the printed quantities, over 1.6 million. In fact, slightly higher than the total 1935 print-run. And this is a supplementary series?

There are also some more errors. The 4c bright blue can be found with what is described as a, “cave in the cliff.” This is a round un-coloured area located towards the end of the cliff in the middle of the design. Its position on the sheets has not been stated, but it is believed to have occurred by damage to the plate on the original 4c dark grey as this fault is not found on any of those issues.

The most significant error though, indeed a very significant one, is another missing Quetzal. This occurs on the 25c green. It is regarded as the scarcest of all Guatemalan errors with only seven to ten known examples and only on used stamps. So no need to search for it, and anyway, if you should miraculously find one they are not cheap. Far from it.

Four of these supplementary issues became part of a surcharged/overprinted set a few months later, but I will come back these later.

The Regular Airmail issues of 1939

This is the last major series of flying Quetzals. They total twenty three issues, three more than the 1935 set. They are easily distinguishable from the earlier sets, firstly because they are larger, measuring 36x21mm, and secondly because they are printed in three colours - one for the ornamental frame areas, another for the pictorial scene and then of course the dark green flying Quetzal. They also represent the bulk of the sum of all the series with a print-run of 4.6 million. That's 56% of all the flying Quetzals issued.

Again printed by Enschede in the Netherlands, the designs this time were from Prudencio Davila whose name is now found in the bottom left hand corner instead of Marckwordt's. The printers name in the opposite bottom corner is now in full, "JOH ENSCHEDE EN ZONEN." In addition, the printings were again on unwatermarked white wove paper but this time, perhaps to reflect the larger format, with a perforation of 12.6. They were issued on 27th January 1939.

There are now five distinct frame designs, with two for domestic and three for foreign services. Figures 6-10 below provide examples of each (Note: the type nomenclature is mine own).



Fig.6 - Domestic Type 1a



Fig.7 - Domestic Type 1b



Fig.8 - Foreign Type 2a



Fig.9 - Foreign Type 2b



Fig.10 - Foreign Type 2c

For clarification, the principal difference between Foreign Type 2a and 2b is that the latter, whilst still having the value designation in figures in the bottom corners, also has "AEREO" and "EXTERIOR" on either side of the frame in large lettering. Type 2a issues differ by having "AEREO INTERNACIONAL" in smaller lettering at the top of the frame. Type 2c is completely different, with ornamentation in the bottom corners and the values placed on either side of the frame. The differences in frame design for both domestic Types 1a and 1b is easily distinguishable.

Another major difference are the positions of the Quetzal. In figure 6 you can see that it is now on the left hand side and flying out of the scenic image. Well, for the 1 cent it is, and also for the 2 cent. The 3 cent and 4 cent issues have the Quetzal back on the right hand side, while for the 5c it has flown back over to the left. In fact, the bird on these issues is extremely restless and zips back and forth.



Fig.11 - Caught midway! The 15c Domestic issue

The Quetzal in the domestic 15 cent can even be found almost in the centre of the image, as if caught in transit! See figure 11 above. For interest, I have tabulated the positions for each issue in Table 7 below:-

Table. 7 - 1939 Airmails Quetzal Positions

Domestic Issues	Position	Foreign Issues	Position
1c - bistre & brown	Left	1c - Olive green & red brown	Right
2c - Carmen rose & dark green	Left	2c - Light green & grey	Right
3c - Dull blue & bistre	Right	3c - Ultramarine & turquoise blue	Left
4c - Rose lilac & yellow green	Right	4c - Chestnut & green	Left
5c - Claret & dark blue	Left	5c - Olive green & red orange	Left
6c - Orange & olive brown	Right	10c - Brown red & slate	Right
10c - Brown & grey	Right	15c - Blue & bright rose	Right
15c - Reddish purple & grey black	Central	20c - Yellow green & apple green	Right
30c - Dark blue & carmine red	Right	25c - Dull violet & olive green	Right
50c - Orange & red violet	Left	30c - Rose & grey black	Right
1q - Yellow green & blue	Right	50c - Scarlet & orange yellow	Right
		1q - Yellow orange & orange green	Right

There are only two known errors with this series, but again one of them is significant. The foreign issue 1c olive green & red brown can be found with a broken "M" in "MAYA." The prize rarity though is yet another missing Quetzal overprint. About ten examples have been found on the domestic issue 50c orange & red violet. So again, very scarce with a high market value.

The details of all the issues for the 1939 airmails can be summarised as per tables 8 and 9 below.

Table.8 - 1939 Regular Airmails (Domestic)

SG	Value	Colour*	Scene	Print-run
376	1c	Bistre & brown	Church of Nuestra La Merced, Antigua	200,000
377	2c	Carmine rose & dark green	Ruins of school in Antigua	200,000
378	3c	Dull blue & bistre	Aurora airport	200,000
379	4c	Rose lilac & yellow green	Military parade ground, Guatemala city	600,000
380	5c	Claret & dark blue	Cavalry barracks, Guatemala city	100,000
381	6c	Orange & olive brown	Palace of Justice, Guatemala city	100,000
382	10c	Brown & grey	Customs house, San Jose	100,000
383	15c	Reddish purple & grey black	Post Office, Retalhuleu	100,000
384	30c	Dark blue & carmine red	Municipal theatre, Quetzaltenango	100,000
385	50c	Orange & red violet	Customs house, Retalhuleu	75,000
386	1q	Yellow green & blue	Departmental palace, Retalhuleu	75,000

* Colour descriptions are from Scott catalogue

Total Print run = 1,775,000

Table.9 - 1939 Regular Airmails (Foreign)

SG	Value	Colour*	Scene	Print-run
387	1c	Olive green & red brown	Maya altar, Aurora Park	200,000
388	2c	Light green & grey	Ministry of Health, Guatemala city	200,000
389	3c	Ultramarine & turquoise blue	View of Lake Amatitlan	200,000
390	4c	Chestnut & green	View of Lake Atitlan	200,000

391	5c	Olive green & red orange	Bridge over Tamazulapa river	300,000
392	10c	Brown red & slate	Monument to the Proceres, Guatemala city	300,000
393	15c	Blue & bright rose	Palace of Captains, Antigua	600,000
394	20c	Yellow green & apple green	Carmen Hill, Guatemala city	150,000
395	25c	Dull violet & olive green	Barrios Square, Guatemala city	150,000
396	30c	Rose & grey black	Mayan altar, Archaeological museum	300,000
397	50c	Scarlet & orange yellow	Charles III fountain, Guatemala city	75,000
398	1q	Yellow orange & orange green	View of Antigua	75,000

* Colour descriptions are from Scott catalogue

Total Print run = 2,825,000

The Overprints and Surcharges

There are three distinct overprinted/surcharged issues.

a) 1937 Philatelic Exposition

The first and largest - it included surface mail as well as airmail regulars. The occasion was to celebrate the Guatemalan Philatelic Society's exhibition that opened in the capital on the 15th March, 1937. The overprinting was undertaken in Guatemala by the Tipografía Nacional on a variety of issues of 1927, 1935, 1936 and 1937. Nine issues in total. They were all issued with their surcharges on the day the exhibition opened.

Four of the 1937 supplementary issues with flying Quetzals were included as follows:-

- 4c Bright blue (interior) - surcharged 1c in carmine. Originally SG300a/now SG329
- 6c Black violet (interior) - surcharged 1c in carmine. Originally SG301a/now SG330
- 10c Olive green (exterior) - surcharged 1c in blue. Originally SG311a/now SG331
- 15c Vermilion (exterior) - surcharged 1c in blue. Originally SG312a/now SG332

As a caution, I understand that the carmine surcharged issues if found on paper should ideally be retained as such and not soaked off as the overprinted ink has a tendency to run!

As well as the Quetzal, the overprinting provides the year "1937" towards the top left and then centred within the image the words, "EXPOSICION FILATELICA." A "+1" is located in the bottom right hand corner. See figure 12 below as an example.



Fig.12 - 1937 Philatelic Exposition 10c Exterior airmail

There was a special cancellation for international mail posted at the exhibition. This is in violet ink. There was also a special presentation booklet with all nine surcharged stamps.

Only the "cave in cliff" flaw for the 4c light blue has been identified with the airmails, although there are errors with other non-flying Quetzal issues.

For the four Quetzal stamps, a total of 80,000 were printed with 20,000 for each value.

b) 1941 Pan American Health Day

This was undertaken on just one issue, the 2c light green & grey from the 1939 (non-domestic) airmails (originally SG388/now SG414). Fittingly, this stamp depicts the Ministry

of Health building. The event, the second of its kind was undertaken jointly with other Latin American countries. The stamp was issued on 2nd December 1941.



Fig.13 - 1941 Pan-American Health Day Overprint

The overprinting (with no surcharge) was performed once more by Tipografia Nacional using carmine ink with a print-run of 100,000 copies. The overprint reads, “DICIEMBRE 2 1941” towards the top left corner of the image, and then, placed centrally at the bottom, “SEGUNDO DIA PAN-AMERICANO DE LA SALUD.” Also see figure 13 above.

c) 1945 Book Fair Provisional Airmail Overprint

And then the final, perhaps sad flight. This is an overprint/surcharge with a two and half cent value on the 3c ultramarine & turquoise (exterior) issue of 1939 and was made available on 25th July 1945. The original was catalogued SG389. The overprint became SG436.

A little over 500 were overprinted in red and the remainder of the print run in other colours. The overprint measures 25x3.75mm and once more this was undertaken by Tipografia Nacional. Across the image, there is the year “1945” and then beneath it the words, “FERIA DEL LIBRO” (Book Fair) followed by the value and “CENTAVOS.” See figure 14 below.



Fig.14 - 1945 Book Fair Provisional

Whilst over 12,500 were produced with the overprint, only 12,000 were actually issued. The missing 500 remains unaccounted for but they may have been placed with the UPU. It's a mystery.

And the stamp is not without controversy. There was criticism of it being unnecessary and it was originally dubbed as, “a speculative issue.” This was of course refuted. Whatever, there is still a sense that few were used postally and that many could have been bought by dealers, although if that is the case, where are they? So far I have not been able to find a single one, whether mint or used. They must be out there somewhere.

And that was that. The very last outing. Ten years of flying Quetzals - whether on the left or the right side - and quite a journey. Very thirties in style, but now highly collectable and much sought after. Deservedly so.