



Collecting Complexity

One Bird, One Design

The Uruguayan Southern Lapwing Series

Here's something different. Just one bird and despite several incarnations, essentially the same design. No, not the New Guinea issues. Same period, but wrong continent. We are off to South America and the rolling plains of Uruguay. Think corned beef, but wings.

The bird is the Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus chilensis*). It's a charming but rather slimmer and leggier version of our own Northern Lapwing, with a particularly striking head and thin backward quiff. It's mainly grey with a black forehead and throat patch extending onto a black breast. Found throughout southern South America, albeit as four sub-species, it is also the official national bird of Uruguay.



The stamps were first issued in June, 1923 with twelve values, but then re-issued with two additional values in July the following year. But a further number repeating some values came the next year, and then again in 1926 and finally some more in 1927. But, they pretty well all look identical. Sometimes the colours change, but only slightly. Sometimes a value is issued and then not seen again; or the watermark changes; or the perforation changes. The same design but lots of subtle variations.



1923 - Original issue



1924 - 1st redrawing



1927 - 4th redrawing

That could sound boring, but they are not. This one design is much more complex and confusing than you might think. To add to the enjoyment there were several overprints as

well. There are a number of official series, three newspaper stamps and some special overprints for the inauguration of a railway to the city of Rocha in eastern Uruguay. Altogether, I have calculated this will give you over 90 stamps, but double that if you collect both used and mint as I do. Oh, and then there are a number of cover combinations on the market. Believe me, you could fill several albums with just this one design. And they are greatly more interesting than dreary old Machins.

So where do we begin? As usual, Stanley Gibbons is very unhelpful here, but an edition of Scott was quite useful. There is also the Stamp Data website edited by Stanley Shebs which helps to flesh out some of the different issues; and finally, the goldmine of the Stampworld free catalogue. So, let's break this intriguing bird issue down.

The series

We have five years of issues, albeit interspersed with overprints and they constitute a series. As mentioned, these years are 1923, 1924, 1925, 1926 and finally, 1927. With 1923 as the original issue, Scott and others refer to the subsequent years as "redrawings," thus, 1924 is the 1st redrawing, 1925 the 2nd redrawing, and so forth. The term is misleading as the design remains the same throughout, with some miniscule changes in 1925 and some very minor retouching to details in 1927. Effectively, it is the same Southern Lapwing and decorative border throughout, and except with very close scrutiny you would be hard pushed to tell them apart.

The values

Let's exclude overprints for the moment. There are twelve values for the original 1923 issue, but two additional values - 10 and 15 cents - for the 1st redrawing in 1924. Subsequent redrawings reduced the number of values issued substantially to about half a dozen. Table.1 below shows the full distribution across all series.

Table 1: Uruguayan Southern Lapwing Series - Distribution of Values

1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
5m	5m	5m	5m	
1c	1c	1c	1c	1c
2c	2c	2c	2c	2c
3c	3c	3c	3c	3c
5c	5c	5c	5c	5c
8c	8c		8c	8c
	10c			
12c	12c	12c		
	15c			
20c	20c			20c
36c	36c		36c	
50c	50c			
1p	1p			
2p	2p			

From the table you can see immediately that the 10c and 15c were only issued in 1924, and the 50c, 1 pesos and 2 pesos in just the first two years. However, the 1c, 2c, 3c and 5c were covered in all issues, while the 5m (equals half a cent) and 8c were available in four of the editions and others in three of the editions. So how do you tell which is from which edition? This is where the fun really starts.

Colours and shades

Let's look at colours. Sometimes the colours for each value change from issue to issue, but the bad news is that that is not always the case, or the changes are so small as to be barely noticeable. Changes in paper quality also exacerbate colour differences. The 5m is always grey, usually a quite pale grey, but in one version a darker shade. Unhelpfully, the 3c is

always grey green and just grey green. The 5c is always blue, usually light blue, sometime “dull” blue or just “blue.” The 2c can be violet but is also found in shades of red in some issues, while the 8c is pink or rose or even rose red. Great! To distinguish can often require very close inspection. The 12c is always a darkish blue and the 20c a shade of dark orange or brown. And so it goes on. Colour is not always over helpful when it comes to identifying which issue is which.

Table.2 is provided below to confuse you further. I have highlighted the values where the colour or shade either does not change or barely changes at all:

Table.2: Uruguayan Southern Lapwing Series - Colours by value

Val	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
5m	Grey	Grey	Grey/black	Grey	
1c	Orange Yellow	Salmon	Dull violet	Light violet	Grey violet
2c	Light violet	Red violet	Bright rose	Red	Vermillion
3c	Grey green	Grey green	Grey green	Grey green	Grey green
5c	Light blue	Light blue	Dull blue	Light blue	Blue
8c	Rose red	Rose		Pink	Rose
10c		Green blue			
12c	Deep blue	Dark blue	Slate blue		
15c		Violet			
20c	Brown orange	Brown			Grey brown
36c	Emerald	Salmon rose		Rose buff	
50c	Orange	Grey green			
1p	Rose red	Orange brown			
2p	Light green	Violet			

With me so far?

Watermarks

There is some help with watermarks. But it's limited. Time to take out your Safe T1 or T2. The 1923 issue has a distinctive Caduceus watermark. That's the staff with entwined snakes carried by Hermes. This is useful. However, the four other issues changed to what became the standard for Uruguayan stamps - REPUBLICA O. DEL URUGUAY. Usually you can pick up a letter or two of this watermark as they were placed across the sheets.

Perforations

So what about perforations? Frankly, I don't think that you will find these of much use either. There are multiples across each year of issue. The 1923 issue can be found with perforations 12.5 or 11.5x12.5; the 1st redrawing also has 12.5 and 11.5 perforations; the 1925 2nd redrawing and 1926 3rd redrawing are found in 11, 11.5 and 10.5; the 4th redrawing in 11 and 11.5 varieties.

The perforation varieties of course increases the number to collect even further, but that doesn't help with identification. To confuse matters further, imperforate examples appear as well.

Size of design

Then there are size variations. Scott gives the dimensions of the design of the original series as 18x22.5mm. The 1924 issue is a little smaller at 17.5x22.5mm and the 1925 issue a little smaller still at 17.5x21.75mm. But the 1926 issues are the same size as the previous year and there does not appear to be any dimensional data for the last issue in 1927. The variations are quite small, although if you place examples from different series together it can give a patchwork effect, particularly when the printing is off centre. And again, variations in paper quality can add to the confusion.

So that's it? We give up in despair? No. There is something that comes to our rescue. There is one unique feature for each of the issues. The imprint. A number of printers were used but, rather fortunately for collectors, the ascription or lack of it tells us which series is which.

The imprints

The 1923 edition is straightforward. It has no imprint at all and for good measure you have the watermark to distinguish it. The other issues do have imprints and these are always located at the bottom of the design. The 1st redrawing has a printer's name - "A BARREIRO Y RAMOS" on the bottom. They were an established printing firm with a long history of printing government documents. Their name is in capitals and normally printed to the right hand side.

This changed in 1925 when stamps were printed directly by the government. The 2nd redrawing bears the imprint "IMPRESA NACIONAL" (National Print/press) and is centred beneath the design. For 1926, this was abbreviated to "IMP NACIONAL" and remained placed centrally under the main image. The abbreviation was retained for the last redrawing in 1927, but the imprint here is moved to the right to sit beneath the value numeral.

The lettering of the imprint is not always clear. This is partly because of their tiny size, but often, yet again, because of paper variations. The letters can appear broken up or almost hieroglyphic, but the positioning, a good magnifying glass and practice will make the determination. All four redrawings from the series, each showing their imprints, are reproduced below.



The Overprints

And then there are the overprints. I left these until last because although they might seem straightforward, there are few complexities here too.



The easy ones to identify are the newspaper stamps, overprinted "PRENSA" in red vertically on the left hand side, and the railway inauguration stamps, also in red, but printed horizontally and relatively wordy. They were both issued late in the series lifetime and quite

close together - the PRENSA overprints in November 1927 and the “INAUGURACION” set in January 1928.

They both use the 1924 (1st redrawing) issue with three values for the newspaper stamps - including a 9 cent for the first time overprinted on the 10c - and four for the railway opening set, which all have values overprinted on the 12c. In addition, the newspaper stamps are imperforate. Examples are provided above.

The Official overprints are a tad more complicated. There are three issues. The first appears in 1924 and are on the original 1923 design, perforated 12.5. These are clearly identifiable as the imprint is absent. However, there are two further issues, but both on the 1924 (1st redrawing). A series were issued during 1926/27 and then a final handful in 1928. The saving grace with the latter issues is that the 1926/27 set is imperforate and without a watermark, while the 1928 set is perforated 12.5 and “usually” on watermarked paper.



All the “OFICIAL” overprints (spelt with one “f”) have lettering in a lenticular form, white on black, and examples can be found placed on either the right or left had side of the design. It all adds to the fun!

To hopefully give some further clarity on all the overprints, Table.3 is produced below:

Table.3 Uruguayan Southern Lapwing Series -
Overprint issues and their values

Official 1924	Official 1926/7	Official 1928	PRENSA (1927)	Railway (1928)
2c	2c	2c		2c
			3c	
5c	5c			5c
	8c	8c		
			9c	
		10c		10c
12c	12c			
			15c	15c
20c	20c			
36c	36c			
50c				
1p				
2p				

Print-runs and market values

Regrettably, I have incomplete information on the numbers produced. There is some partial data for the 1923 and 1924 issues which suggest that certainly over 17 million were printed for the original series and well over 30 million for the 1st redrawing. Sadly in both cases there are no figures for the common 5 cent, and 1 million is given for the 3 cent in 1924. I think we can summarise by saying there’s a lot of them!

I wouldn't normally comment on the cost of purchasing stamps. You either collect them or you don't, and if you do then you usually know where that will take you. Printed catalogue prices and a scan of Ebay suggests that singles or sets can be found relatively inexpensively, although the highest values of the 1923 set are probably the most costly. Seemingly, covers can be another matter. Dependent on the combination of values, condition and so forth prices can vary, but I have seen some going at over £20 for a few values and more recently, one with six low value plus a 50c quoted at £35. It's a mixture. I am sure that there are some going at much higher prices as well as some at quite affordable levels.

Excluding cover combinations, did I say about 180 mint and used stamps to collect? Hmn, perhaps an underestimate. If you factor in perforation varieties and colour/shade variations, not to mention paper quality, print quality - some issues are considerably off-centre - and then postmarks or interesting cachets, then there are many hundreds to seek. Just one bird and one design. Infinitely fascinating. Good hunting!