

Bird Stamp Research whilst in Hibernation

Continuing to trawl through my assortment of 80 stamps, I come across two clean looking issues from the Soviet Union, which I find form part of a set of six rare birds issued to mark the XVIII International Ornithological Congress that took place in Moscow on 16-24 August 1982. The logo of and reference to the Congress is included in the two stamps in the top left-hand corner.

The stamps I have are the lowest value (2k) which features the hooded crane (*Grus monacha*) and the fourth value (10k) the bar headed goose (*Eulabeia indica*). This is a nice set with what look like clean watercolour illustrations of the birds. The four birds that I am missing are the Steller's sea eagle (4k), spoon-billed sandpiper (6k), sociable lapwing or sociable plover (15k) and the white stork (32k). From www.bird-stamp.org it looks like these issues, the white stork excluded, accurately reflect their real life existence and are relatively rare finds on postage stamps, notably the sociable lapwing (3) and the spoon-billed sandpiper (2). These all look well worth following up, not least to find out why all of these birds are so rare. For example, Birdlife International - www.birdlife.org - indicates that the sociable lapwing "is listed as Critically Endangered because its population has undergone a very rapid reduction, for reasons that are poorly understood but are likely to be at least partly due to hunting along the migration flyway". Interestingly, if the sociable lapwing has a home, it is in what is now Kazakhstan. The overall estimated population is just 11,200. I will certainly do more thorough research on these birds.

Next out of the packet is a complete set of six CTO stamps from Bulgaria, with brooding images of the birds that they portray. The set of six includes: (5ct) herring gull (*Larus argentatus*); (5ct) white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*); (8ct) hooded crow; (8ct) grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*); (10ct) northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*); and the (42ct) eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*). I particularly like the image of the owl: the orange-red of the eyes conveys the power of this bird, as it grips its prey.

Next from the packet are two larger format CTO stamps from Cuba. These look to be more of a fun issue, featuring a toucan (*Ramphastos toco*) and a scarlet ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*). I had to go to the www.freestampcatalogue.com to find out about these stamps. I find that they are from a set of six, featuring what I would term exotic birds: my eyesight is not good enough to identify the other four depicted, but I do conclude that I have the better ones, in terms of both species and design.

The inclusion of "Brasiliana 89" on each stamp I thought at first might be reference to an ornithological or ecological conference, but turns out to be an International Stamp Exhibition, which took place in Rio de Janeiro. It looks like these stamps are a special issue linked to that philatelic event: were they ever in normal postal use?

What I know about toucans is limited to the old Guinness adverts; but despite this well known image, there are few of them on stamps, apparently, than I thought that there would be: just six showing at www.bird-stamp.org. Similarly, there are not too many of the scarlet ibis stamps out there either, fewer than ten. So, it might be easy to build a modest

collection based on these two particular birds; something to think about. Preliminary reading on Birdlife International indicates that neither of these birds is threatened (classified as “least concern”), though both have decreasing populations, currently not at a sufficient rate to raise the vulnerability classification. I also confirm that these birds are native residents of South America, so the reference to Brasiliana is relevant for more than one reason.

What else is in the assortment? Well, there were 10 stamps featuring symbolic birds – doves of peace (Bulgaria, Vietnam, Soviet Union) and eagles on coats of arms (Poland). I quickly pass over these, onto a 1979 CTO 3k stamp from Zaire (Congo) that features a colourful regal sunbird (*Cinnyris regus*). I discover that this stamp is one of eight issued to mark the exploration of the River Congo (or Zaire) which divides two countries; the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). As I have visited the former, but not the latter, I am interested in this stamp, though I cannot recall ever having seen this bird in reality, though that was over 30 years ago. Birdlife.org tells me that this bird is native in the East of the Republic of Congo and across the border in Burundi and Rwanda. That would explain why I never saw it in Brazzaville, though I do find that it is on one stamp issued by the Republic of Congo back in 1967. Whilst the numbers of regal sunbird are decreasing, it is currently classified as “least concern”. This bird hasn’t featured on too many stamps, just four, including this one from Zaire.

The remaining mix includes three used “Cockerel” stamps from France, three 1990 pen and ink drawings from North Korea from a set of five, featuring a moorhen, whimbrel and a water rail. There are also four stamps from the former German Democratic Republic (DDR) from a series issued in 1973, which show a simplicity of design, as illustrated by the 40 pfennig Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*). An attractive bird, which www.bird-stamps.org suggests has only been captured eight other times on a stamp, from the Isle of Man to Taiwan via Switzerland, Hungary, Kuwait, Kampuchea, Laos with a dog leg over the Maldives. A colourful bird worthy of additional stamp coverage, I think.

Conclusion? As a means of generating random interest in particular birds and stamps during lockdown, this exercise has worked for me, as a means of stimulating initial research beyond what I might otherwise look at. Now I have to get back to work looking for other examples of that sociable lapwing.

Steven Ardron
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Soviet Union - Hooded crane (*Grus monacha*)



Soviet Union - Bar headed goose (*Eulabeia indica*)



Bulgaria – Eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*)



Bulgaria – Grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*)



Bulgaria - Hooded crow (Corvus cornix)



Toucan (Ramphastos toco)



Scarlet Ibis (Eudocimus ruber)



Regal sunbird (Cinnyris regus)



Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

