

Random bird stamp research when in hibernation

One of the madder ideas that I pursued whilst in hibernation was an exercise in random research of bird stamps. I decided that an ideal trigger - my random number generator - was to go online and buy a pack of "80 collectable bird stamps" from a well known high street bookseller and stationer. A week went by whilst I waited for the packet to arrive, but I didn't doubt for a minute that I would get my £6.99's worth of value and I was not let down.

First up out of the packet were four early Buzins in good used condition, always a welcome addition to my collection. But I was looking for something more exotic; and I was not disappointed. Next out of the packet came four stamps from Tanzania, which I later learned came from a set of seven birds of prey stamps, issued in 1994.

These were a real find, with high quality artwork, a nice matt finish rather than high gloss sheen; and interesting birds that I haven't come across before in my own conservative collection. The most striking of the four was the colourful 250' value featuring a close up of the King Vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*). This I discovered (from Avibase – The World Bird database) is: "*a large bird found in Central and South America (and which) is a member of the New World vulture family Cathartidae*". Very interesting, as I had initially assumed that the four birds in this set would be native of, or visitors to, the African continent. No matter, the King Vulture is a powerful stamp on artwork alone and worth adding to my collection.

Next up was the 50' value, showing the Ornate Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus ornatus*) which Avibase tells me is "*a bird of prey from the tropical Americas*". Another non-native then, though I then read that there is an African Hawk Eagle that is "*distributed from south of the Sahara to just south of the tropic of Capricorn in South Africa*" (Source: www.krugerpark.co.za) which gets me wondering if the instructions to the artist and/or designer included a miscommunication on which raptors to include in this set.

On to the 170' African Fish-Eagle (*Haliaeetus vocifer*) which I discover is widespread across Southern Africa and as well as "*feeding extensively on fish, in some areas it also preys on flamingos and other water birds. It is also known to eat carrion and is classified as a kleptoparasite, as it steals prey from other birds*" (Source: www.krugerpark.co.za).

The fourth and final stamp from this set is the 100' value showing an Osprey (*Pandion Haliaeetus*) which I can see from stunning images on <http://.tanzaniabirds.net> is present in Eastern Africa.

There is enough here from these four stamps to stimulate more thoughtful research on these birds and on these stamps. I'd like to know who did the artwork. I'd also like to know if they are available postally used; these examples are CTO, which I'm happy to have. A glance at the issues from Tanzania in 1994 (www.freestampcatalogue.com) shows a plethora of stamps ranging from "65 Years of Mickey Mouse" (12 values) to those celebrating football and the World Cup (five separate issues). Amongst the more bizarre of these entries - commemorating Western sailing ships, Ford and Mercedes Benz cars, Hummel figurines and European aviation history - there are some really good stamps featuring crabs and spiders which are similar to the birds' issue; and may have involved the same designers; and more important, may feature local fauna. Being in confinement means I can't go to the Library to look up the Stanley Gibbons World Catalogue in the reference section, just to see if these bird stamps have a full listing; or might be included in an Annex as issued surplus to normal requirements. Let's hope the former and not the latter.

Beyond the additional research, the next step of course is to obtain the three missing values from this set of seven. Do I take a gamble on finding them in another of the £6.99 assorted packs?

King Vulture (Sarcoramphus papa)



African Fish Eagle (Haliaeetus vocifer)



Osprey (Pandolin Haliaetus)



Ornate Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus ornatus*)

