

# BIRDS ON UNIVERSAL MAIL STAMPS

By Steve Ardron

**B**rowsing through back issues of Flight brought me to the four bird stamps issued in 2018 by Kyrgyz Express Post, the independent postal service provider which operates alongside the pre-existing, national Kyrgyzstan Post Office. This prompted me to think of the Universal Mail stamps here in Britain, which have been available for just over ten years. Universal Mail issues tourist and bespoke stamps for use solely on postcards to be sent worldwide. You can send your postcard via any Royal Mail post box. The cost of these stamps can vary, but in general the base price (in 2019) is £1.35, the international rate charged by Royal Mail up to 20 grams. Universal Mail issues these stamps in strips of five. The bottom of the strip bears a reference number and the date of printing. So far, three of the numerous issues feature birds.

The first of these is the Historic Royal Palaces strip (UK0032), which is available at the Tower of London, which shows a close up of a Raven (see below).



The Fourth Edition of this strip, (dated 02/19) includes a new picture of the Raven, replacing the photograph in use since the first edition made available in 2011 (07/11), though I have not yet been able to buy this.

The Tower of London shop also issues postcards (one including a Raven), so the possibility of combing the two is available for anyone interested.

The Animals of Scotland Strip (UK0057) first issued in 2012 and now in its eleventh edition (latest dated 02/19), features two bird stamps: a photograph of three puffins and one photo of a Golden Eagle.



Judging by the number of editions, this strip is popular.

The third strip is the one for the National Trust, Brownsea Island (UK0127 12/14) which has one photograph showing a resident peacock. According to the National Trust, these birds were probably introduced from South Asia to Brownsea Island in the Edwardian era, at a time when "many British stately homes adopted them". On this particular strip, it is probably the squirrel that is the more interesting wildlife, as the island is a safe haven for the red squirrel.

For the bird watcher, there is probably also more interesting birdlife to see looking out into Poole Harbour than gazing inland to look for the peacocks.

Note that you should allow at least three weeks for the Universal Mail postcards to arrive at their destination overseas (even in Europe). From experience, Royal Mail does cancel the Universal Mail stamps as the postcards go through the sorting office, so if you are lucky, you should also get a good cancellation with the stamp.

