

Recent Bird Stamps from Bosnia Herzegovina (BH Pošta)

Prosecuting Peacocks?

One of the consequences of the Coronavirus situation is that I am spending more time at home than I might otherwise do, primarily to “keep safe”. Naturally, this is proving difficult to do, because I am eager to explore the county of Dumfries and Galloway, which is now my new home.

I was sifting through my new bird stamps from Bosnia Herzegovina that had just arrived, when on the radio, I hear a story about five peacocks that have roamed the village of Henfield (West Sussex). The police had allegedly threatened these peacocks with death, following complaints from some villagers about the impact of the peacocks on gardens and property. A rival group have got together to save the birds from extinction and to provide a more permanent home, to avoid them roaming the streets and gardens of the village.

Ordinarily I would not have been at home to hear such a story. Coincidentally, one of the stamps that I had in front of me when the radio blared out this story was the 27 March 2020 BH Pošta issue of a peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) in a miniature sheet format, as below:

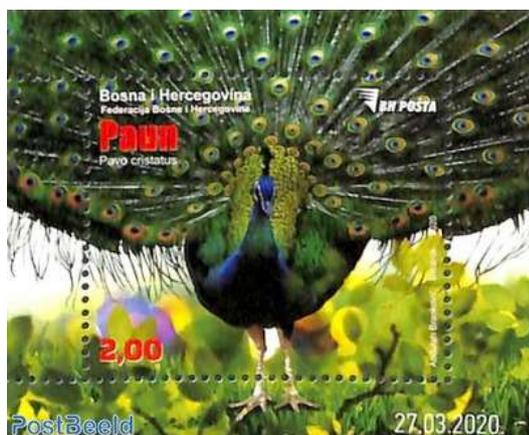


Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>

I had hoped to be able to obtain from BH Pošta some information to explain why they had decided to issue this stamp, but my attempts to email them were not successful.

However, Gilly has managed to translate for me the BH Pošta Bulletin on this issue, which provides the following helpful information:

- The stamp sheet was designed by Abdulh Branković, with 10,000 copies of the sheet issued. There were just 150 of the official First Day Covers to accompany this issue;
- The peacock is a large bird originally from South Asia, but is widespread and domesticated all over the world;
- Peacocks are the largest of the pheasant (Phasianidae) family. If you include the length of the tail feathers and the wings, then the peacock is considered the largest bird in the world that has the ability to fly.

BH Pošta has previously issued one bird stamp in a similar format: this was the mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) in 2010, as below:



Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>

Unfortunately, this mute swan sheet is one of the BH Pošta stamps that I have not yet been able to buy. So, this remains a gap in my BH Posta bird collection.

BH Pošta is not the only European country to have issued stamps featuring the peacock, or Indian peafowl. Here is a recent one from Jersey:



Image source: <http://www.birdtheme.org>

This stamp comes from a set of six that Jersey Post issued in 2019 to commemorate national birds (as part of the Europa issue) but at the same time, Jersey Post also linked the featured bird with “...the traditional symbolic meaning with which they are associated.”. The peacock is apparently associated with “Glory and dignity”. This issue also included one stamp of a mute swan, which I discover is associated with “Purity and love”. I didn’t know that.



Image source: <http://www.birdtheme.org>

Globally, there is no shortage of stamps that feature either the peacock or the mute swan. The peacock (or Indian peafowl) is also the national bird of India, which through the years, India Post have issued a number of stamps that include a peacock. This 2016 stamp from Niuafo’ou subtly

brings together the central image of a peacock with illustrations of the national flowers of Niuafu'ou [Tonga] and India (respectively the Heilala and Lotus Flower). Mahatma Gandhi also appears in the tip right hand corner of the stamp, because the sheetlet of four stamps from which this issue derives, celebrates both the life of Gandhi (1896-1948) and animals of India.



Image source: <http://www.birdtheme.org>

Poisoning Pigeons in the Park?

Back now to the issues from Bosnia Herzegovina that I received the other day. Next up were two Europa stamps featuring pigeons (or Rock Doves, *Columba livia*) issued in se-tenant format. Interestingly, these stamps are not from the 2019 series of national birds, but relate to the 2020 theme, celebrating ancient postal routes. This becomes more obvious when you see the first day cover. BH Pošta issued these two stamps in May 2020 both in a miniature sheet (see below) as well as on stamp sheets.

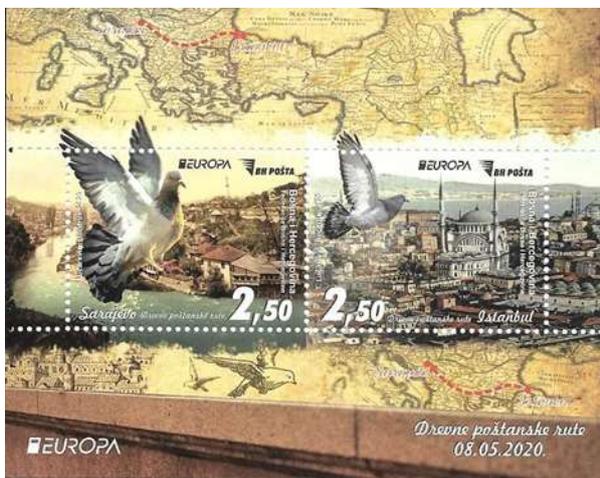
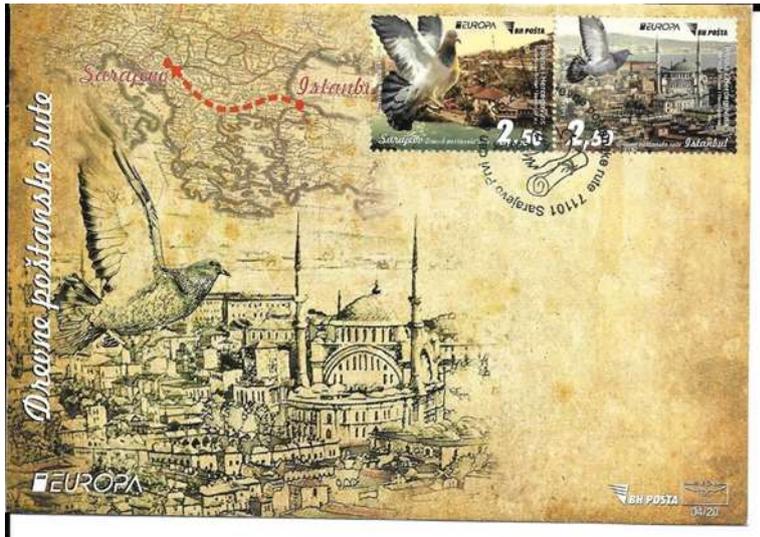


Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>



When I first saw these stamps, what first came to mind was a comedic song that I was introduced to and heard roughly 45 years ago by the American satirical song-writer Tom Lehrer, called *Poisoning Pigeons in the Park*. That song itself may well be around 70 years old and suggests perhaps how long pigeons have, for some people at least, been unloved. The song became one of Tom Lehrer's more enduring and memorable works.

Pigeons have featured quite often on stamps. Generally, this has been in two sub-themes: one commemorating pigeons as a means of communication (message carriers) as in the BH Pošta issue; and the other, to celebrate "pigeon fancying" and pigeon racing. Somewhat in the middle of these categories is the 2019 Europa issue from the Vatican:



Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>

The Vatican Numismatic and Philatelic Office describe the pigeon stamp thus:

*"The pigeon, better known as the Western wild pigeon, is a fairly widespread species of **Columbids**. From its domestic form **Columba livia domestica**, which includes the traveling pigeons and numerous ornamental breeds, descend the semi-wild pigeons widespread in almost the entire world, especially in the squares of the big cities, like our own St. Peter's Square."*

To illustrate stamps that celebrate pigeon racing, here's an example from Magyar Posta (Hungary Post) issued in January 2015. These commemorates the 34th racing Pigeon Olympiad which took place in Budapest. The two stamps were also accompanied by a miniature sheet (one stamp, value 450 Ft) which is also shown below and which makes clearer the purpose of the issue.



Image source: <https://eshop.posta.hu/storefront/>



But back to Bosnia Herzegovina: the 2020 issue was not the only stamp set that featured pigeons. Back in 1999, BH Pošta issued this set of two stamps that celebrate the flora and fauna of the country. The fauna is represented by pigeons (as below).



Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>

This colourful sheet of four stamps “Pigeons and Doves” from Nevis issued in March 2019 shows the beauty of the Rock Dove to good effect in the \$7 value:

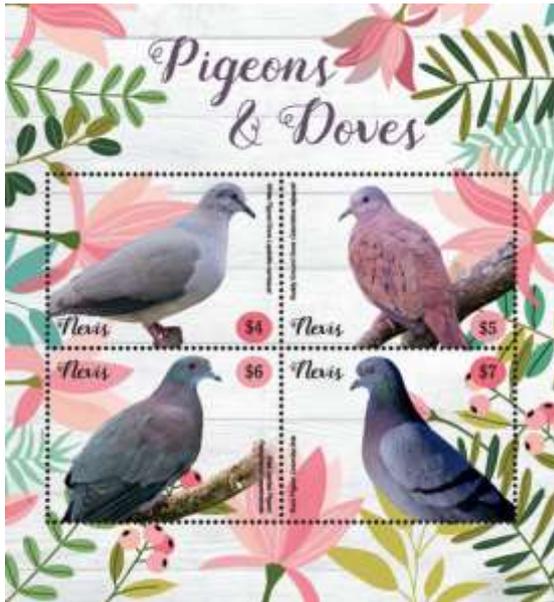


Image source: www.igpc.com

In March 2020, Belgium issued this miniature sheet on the history of pigeon racing. According to the UK based Royal Pigeon Racing Association (RPRA), the Royal Family in Belgium apparently had a strong interest in pigeon racing and were instrumental in introducing our Royal Family to the sport. Back in 1886, King Leopold II gifted some racing pigeons to the Royal Family which have raced on the Sandringham Estate. Our monarchs have apparently continued their interest in racing pigeons since that introduction.



Image source: www.wopa-plus.com

The Eagle has landed

In 2017, BH Pošta issued this 0.90 single stamp featuring the Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Clanga pomarina*). I was attracted by the fine artwork to this particular stamp: I would like to know who the designer is, but once again have not been able to find out from the BH Posta website, as the web shop is closed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>

2019 Europa Issues – National Birds

The BH Pošta contribution to the 2019 Europa issue on national birds included two stamps, one of which features the Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) which, according to the PostEurop website, was the BH Pošta nominated “national bird”. The second stamp features the Shore Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) as one of the national birds of Bosnia Herzegovina.



Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>

Interestingly, the two other postal administrations in Bosnia Herzegovina chose different national birds for their 2019 Europa issues. The contribution from Pošte Srpska, issued in April 2019, also featured two birds: the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).



Image source: www.wopa-plus.com

In April 2019, Hrvatska Pošta Mostar also issued two stamps, but this time in a miniature sheet. The two national birds featured were the Great Tit (*Parus major*) and the Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*).

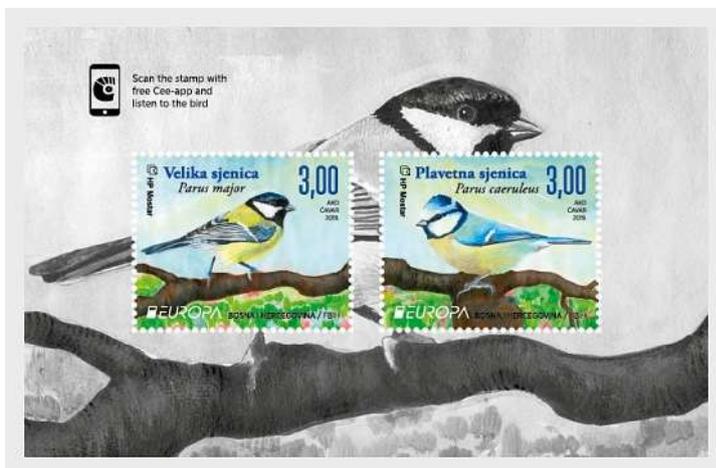


Image source: www.wopa-plus.com

2008 Definitive issues

Finally, I found two bird stamps in the 2008 definitive issues, which also included other images from nature (e.g. trees and lynx). The two birds featured were: the Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) on the 0.70 value; and the Eurasian Eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*) on the 5.00 value.



Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>

Summary

BH Pošta offer a variety of bird stamps and I have by no means acquired as yet the full range. I would particularly like to obtain the 2017 Blue Heron miniature sheet (see below), principally because the artwork on this stamp looks similar to that of the Lesser Spotted Eagle, also issued in 2017 (above). Other bird stamps issued in the last twenty years include: the White Stork (1998); the Griffon Vulture and Eurasian Spoonbill (2000) and the Swallow (2009).



Image source: <https://www.freestampcatalogue.com/>

Postscript

As I wrote this piece, my November edition of L'Écho de la Timbrologie arrived. I read that in September, in Italy, the Asiago International Philatelic Art awards took place. The Italian Academy of Philately and Postal History gave a prize to this 2019 Austrian stamp (below) which reproduces a photograph dating from 2007 by the artist Anna Jermolaewa, entitled "Good Times, Bad Times". This was an extra award beyond the normal range of prizes. It is interesting to speculate if it was the presence of the nine pigeons – those unloved birds – that brought about that additional award.



Image source : <https://onlineshop.post.at>

Steven Ardron

4 November 2020