

Incongruous Issues

The IGPC website does offer a few opportunities to explore what I have termed incongruous bird stamp issues. Some of these are illustrated below.

Inca Tern (*Larosterna inca*)

On 16 May 2019, Guyana issued a set of five stamps that celebrated the Inca Tern. Both the souvenir sheet, which features the \$800 value; and the four stamps printed in a second sheet (with values of \$100, \$300, \$500 and \$700) are impressive in the design and quality of the photographic images. A worthy addition to the global catalogue of bird stamps, I would have thought.

But there is, of course, a clue in the title. The American Bird Conservancy website – where the Inca Tern featured as bird of the week back in 18 July 2014 – describes the usual habitat of this bird as being along the Western edge of South America, from Peru all the way down to Chile. Its territorial range doesn't stray much beyond that coast. That is because its natural food source is in the cold waters of the Humboldt [or Peru] Current that flows northwards from the South Pacific Ocean up the Western coastline of South America.



The Inca Tern feeds on anchovies and other small fish and reaches these by “plunge diving and surface dipping”. It is also a scavenger, taking fish scraps from sea lions, dolphins and passing fishing boats.

The decline in the fish stock (possible over-fishing of anchovy) has apparently contributed to a decreasing trend in the population. Back in 2014, the American Bird Conservancy indicated that there are approximately 150,000 of Inca Terns. The nests of the Inca Tern may also be subject to predation by rats and cats.



The animalia website also highlights some interesting facts about the Inca Tern: it has a lifespan of 14-20 years; is around 39-42cm long; and weighs 180-210 grams. The most striking feature is, of course, the white moustache, contrasting with the dark-grey body and the red-orange of the beak. The Inca Tern breeds on coasts that have sandy beaches, but also frequent inshore guano islands and offshore islands where the coast is rocky.

Inca Terns are also monogamous, with pairs returning to the same mating sites years after year.

Guyana is not the only country where it is seemingly illogical to have issued an Inca Tern stamp: the bird theme website indicates that both Mozambique and Antigua and Barbuda have also done so. In the one stamp issued by Peru, the Inca Tern shares billing with a bat. There are no issues from Chile, which is a shame.

If you want to see an Inca Tern in captivity, then they may be present at the Bournemouth Oceanarium. Quite why they are there is not fully explained on the website.

The Inca Tern has “Near Threatened” status.

It would be ideal to find a used version of one of these stamps on a cover that was sent from Guyana either to Peru or to Chile. That would be an appropriate application for this issue.

Penguins of the Caribbean – Grenada Grenadines

This sheet of six \$2 stamps dates from 25 June 2007 and helpfully provides a marginal narrative about the characteristics of penguins.



The stamps feature **the Royal Penguin (*Eudyptes schlegeli*)** which I discovered is a native resident of Macquarie Island, deep in the Southern Ocean, but may also be found on Clerk and Bishop Islands. These territories are legally attached to Australia (the State of Tasmania). Apparently, it is known for some individual Royal Penguins to get lost on their travels, but they tend to arrive in the Falkland Islands or South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, rather than gravitating towards Petit Martinique or Carriacou in the Grenadines.

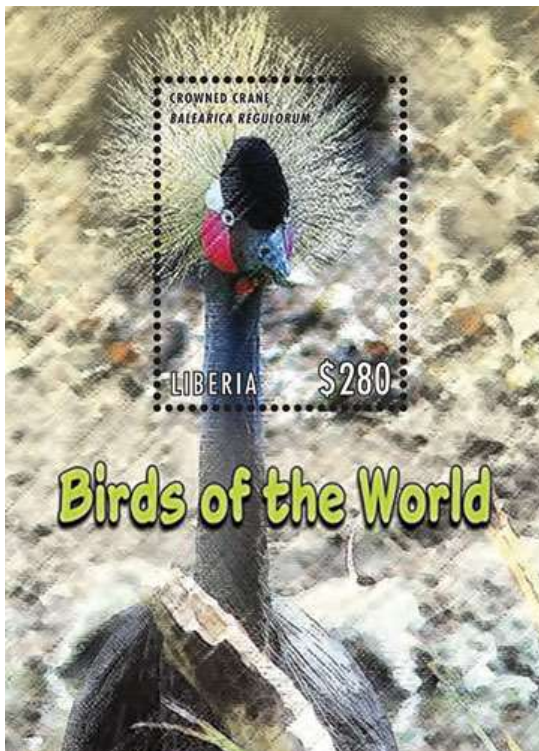
Penguins-World indicates that there are around 2.1 million Royal Penguins, with a stable population. The Royal Penguin is around 63-68 centimetres in height and 5 kg in weight. Life expectancy in the wild is around 12 years, though Penguin International suggests that the age range is 15-20 years.

As can be seen on the stamps, the chief characteristic of the Royal Penguin is the yellow crested feathers, parted in the middle of the head. The Royal Penguin can be distinguished from the Macaroni Penguin, which is also crested, by its pale or white face. The bill of the Royal Penguin is red or orange in colour (as can be seen on the stamps) and the legs and feet are pink (just about visible in the images).

The Royal Penguin also has “Near Threatened” status.

The Grey Crowned Crane from Liberia

This stamp – as part of a miniature sheet – celebrates the Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica Regularum*), issued on 30 July 2013, under the “Birds of the World” theme. Unfortunately, the Grey Crowned Crane is not a native of Liberia, but can be found on the African continent, in a belt that stretches from Kenya, through Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique and Zimbabwe and parts of South-eastern South Africa.



In researching this bird, I did find that it is the national bird of Uganda, a status that it has enjoyed for over 100 years, apparently. When at rest, the crest of the crane can seem to be in the colours of the Ugandan flag: yellow, black and red. This sits above a multi-coloured head: a black forehead combined with white and red around the cheeks, as is amply illustrated on the Liberian stamp.

The Crowned Crane is around a metre in height and stands on long, slim black legs. The neck of the Crane is almost as long as the legs. The feathers are pearl grey and elongated, almost to provide an ornamental fringe to the wings.

The Grey Crowned crane feeds on grass seeds, small toads, insects and other invertebrates and are also known to forage for millet, soya and potatoes – where these are being grown on farms located near their habitats.

Sadly, the Grey Crowned Crane is an endangered species, owing to the activities of humans, some of whom see the cranes as potential pets to show off; whilst others target the eggs and feathers for supposed medicinal purposes. Poaching and illegal trade therefore represent the greatest threat to these birds. Instead of tending their nests and chicks, the

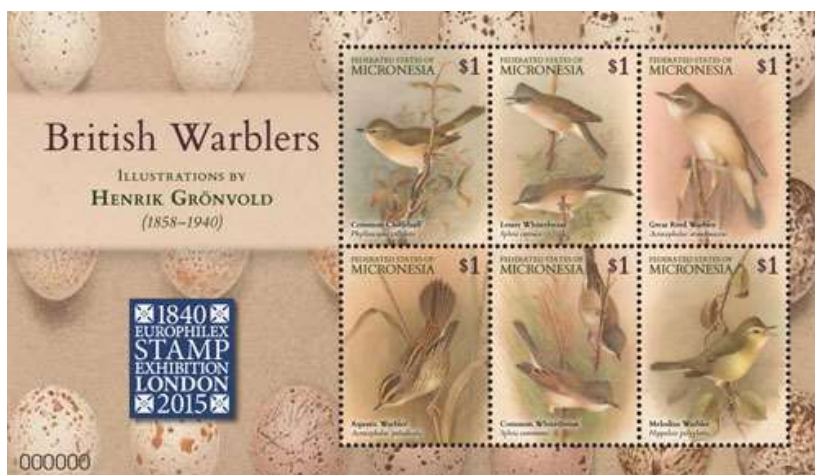
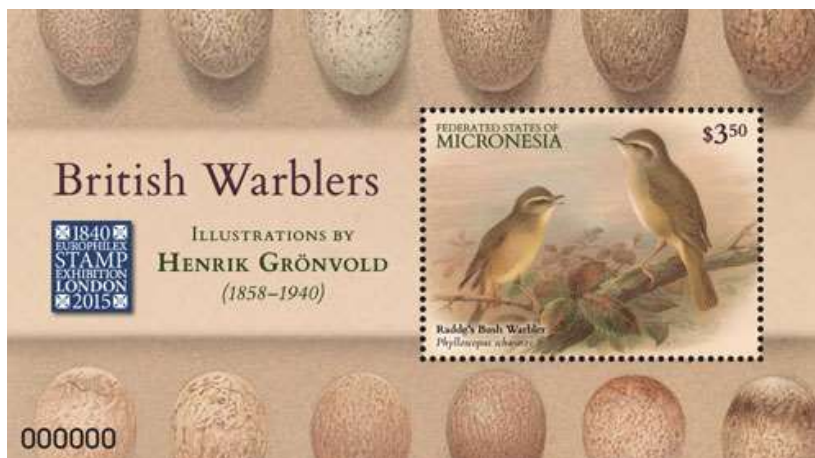
cranes have to watch out for potential incursions by humans. The Grey Crowned Cranes is apparently fabled for its gentle nature, which makes the predation by humans all the more appalling.

Added to these problems is the usual narrative of “habitat degradation” which also threatens the crane’s future existence.

Whilst the Grey Crowned Crane is not a native resident of Liberia, it is a worthy addition if through the stamp the threatened status of the Grey Crowned Crane comes to light. Though of course the overarching theme could have been “Endangered Birds of Africa” rather than Birds of the World.

Micronesia – British Warblers

On 16 April 2015, the Federated States of Micronesia issued this sheet with a \$3.50 single stamp that features Radde’s Bush Warbler (*Phylloscopus schwarzi*). The theme for this issue is “British Warblers”. At first glance the British connection is fairly obvious: the London 2015 Stamp Exhibition at the Islington Business Centre. It is a sober issue and is also accompanied by a sheet of six additional illustrations by Henrik Grönvold featuring six birds in the warbler family.



Henrik Grönveld was apparently a well-known Danish naturalist and artist, famous for his illustrations of birds. From what I have been able to view, his artwork is sought after in auctions and covers an impressive array of watercolours, lithographs and other artworks. The detail in all of these works of art are stunning, in particular the illustrations of birds' eggs which look so naturalistic. The marginal illustrations on this sheet provide an example of this.

The Radde's Warbler is a bird with an extensive geographical range – from Western Europe eastwards through to Siberia and China. It also extends down into South Eastern Asia. Unfortunately, that range does not normally extend into Oceania and Micronesia. Despite this geographical spread, this Micronesian stamp of the Radde's Warbler stamp is the only one that appears to have been ever issued, so on those grounds alone, is a worthy addition to the global stamp catalogue.

For completeness, the six birds on the second sheet are: Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*), Great Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*), Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*), Common Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) and the Melodious Warbler (*Hippolais polyglottal*).

Conclusion

All of these issues, whilst not necessarily being connected to the country of issue, have none the less provided colourful stamps which have stimulated interesting research for me. The artwork of the IGPC stamps is by and large impressive and they are striking in one form or another. I will certainly be adding the above stamps to my collection.

I understand from an email exchange with the IGPC that the artwork is done in-house by their own design team. Thanks also to the various sources as listed for their assistance.

Sources

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