

St Vincent and The Grenadines - The Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

5 March 2020

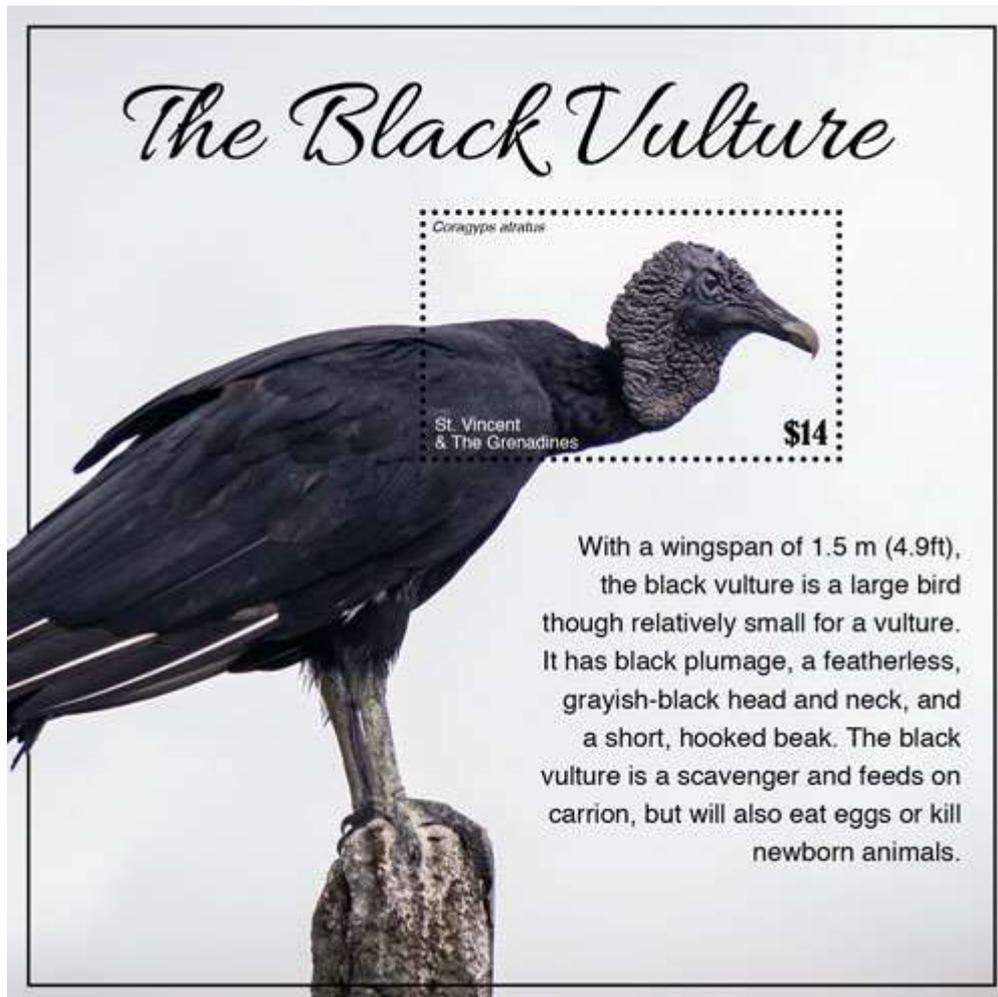
St Vincent and The Grenadines is another country with an extensive range of bird stamps. For this March 2020 issue, I was struck by the powerful design of this miniature sheet and set of four stamps from the Inter-Governmental Philatelic Corporation for the St Vincent and The Grenadines Postal Corporation. I particularly like the background image, with the imposing photograph of the Black Vulture. I also think that it is helpful too to have a commentary about the Black Vulture incorporated into the margin.



Reading from the Avibase, the Black Vulture (or American Black Vulture) can be found from South Eastern United States, all the way down through central America and South America, as far as Chile and Uruguay. Closer scrutiny of the distribution map, however, indicates that whilst the Black Vulture may be present in Cuba, it is a relatively rare visitor to other countries in that region (Jamaica, Bermuda, the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands).

I then went to the website of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds where I found the freely available “*Complete Checklist of the birds of the West Indies*” in which the Black Vulture is mentioned as a “Rare Breeding Resident”, so I guess that it is conceivable that the Black Vulture might be spotted (from time to time) in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Information on the Birdlife data zone also indicates that the Black Vulture is endemic to the mainland of South America, central America and the South East of the United States, but with limited presence in the Caribbean.



Impressive as these stamps are, they do not depict a native bird. Which is a problem if you confine your collecting to bird stamps that are either resident in or regular visitor to the country of issue.

I was able in this instance to find the current postal rates from the website of the St Vincent and the Grenadines Postal Corporation, to compare against the five values of the individual stamps. The only price that I was able to find that corresponded to the value of an individual stamp was the \$5.00 inland express rate (1 lb or less) for a letter/small packet. The basic postage rate for the near-Caribbean is \$1.70 for a letter, rising to \$2.20 for the Bahamas, Bermuda, Cuba, Mexico, USA and Canada; \$3.70 for Australia and Asia; and \$2.65 for Europe. Airmail parcel post rates start at \$16.55,

so there may be some use for the \$14.00 stamp, but only when used in combination with make-up values (if such exist).

Clearly, these Black Vulture stamps will probably have limited genuine postal usage, which is a considerable shame considering how striking they are. I hope that I am wrong in this conclusion. If you do collect these stamps, then it is for the quality of the artwork and the effort that has gone into that. I will be ordering them myself for that reason.

The bird theme website indicates that Guyana, Nicaragua, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago have each issued a Black Vulture Stamp (all are countries where the Black Vulture may be found). The odd one out here is Mozambique, with one stamp.

Sources:

<https://www.igpc.com/>

<https://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/>

<https://www.birdscaribbean.org/caribbean-birds/>

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

http://svgpost.gov.vc/postoffice/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=6

Steven Ardron

5 September 2020