

Bird Stamps of Kyrgyzstan – Issued by Kyrgyz Express Post

2014-2020

Preamble

Browsing through some back issues of Flight magazine, I saw a picture of one of the stamps issued by Kyrgyz Express Post (KEP) and it crossed my mind that it might be interesting to do a review of the bird stamps issued so far by this postal operator, from the date that they started to issue stamps in November 2014, through to 2020.

Never mind that I have not yet completed my review of recent stamps issued in Bosnia Herzegovina, or that I have Parts Two and Three to complete on an article on Bird Stamps of Macedonia, or that I still have to contact the Post Office in New Caledonia about their Kagu booklets: all these projects can simmer away whilst I start something new. Which leads me to this piece on the Bird Stamps of KEP.

Who are KEP?

KEP is the second postal operator in Kyrgyzstan and run postal services alongside (and in competition with) the national legacy provider, Kyrgyzstan Post (KP). The Kyrgyz Republic's Government granted KEP an operator's licence initially in December 2012, which was given international endorsement in 2013 through the Universal Postal Union. KEP issued its first stamps in December 2014 and since then has produced up to ten sets each year. Many of the issues are single stamp issues; others are in sets of four, but overall, the issuing policy is relatively modest and the print runs reasonably conservative (around 10,000).

In my view, what does make these stamps attractive is a combination of the quality of the design and artwork; the quality of the printing; and that the stamps remain (traditionally) gummed, rather than self-adhesive.

KEP has already provided us with a good range of bird stamps, with the promise of more to come, now that KEP has decided to issue a bird stamp each year, assisted in this endeavour by the Kyrgyz Wildlife Conservation Society (KWCS), who select the bird to be featured. If only Royal Mail had such vision.

Where is Kyrgyzstan?

Kyrgyzstan is a landlocked Central Asian independent state that emerged from the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is bordered by Kazakhstan to the North, China in the East, Tajikistan to the South and Uzbekistan to the West. The population of the country is around six million¹.

The geography of Kyrgyzstan is dominated by mountains: mountain ranges cover 80-90 per cent of the country. There are lower lying valley areas to the North and the South West. Some 35 per cent of the land sits at 3,000 metres or more above sea level. Kyrgyzstan is host to the second largest

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16186907>

alpine lake in the world; the Issyk-Kul, which is located to the North East of the country. Rivers are also plentiful in the country, with the Naryn cutting across the country from East to West, complemented by the Chu to the North, the Ak-Say to the South and the Karra-Dyrra to the South West². The topography of the country means that less than eight per cent of the land can be used for cultivation³.



Source: <http://www.ezilon.com/maps/asia/kyrgyzstan-physical-maps.html>

The Bird Stamps

2014 Fauna of Kyrgyzstan

KEP's second stamp issue put on centre stage the Fauna of Kyrgyzstan, which included one bird stamp, featuring the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*), in dramatic action about to pounce on its prey.

2014 Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*)



² <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/kyrgyzstan>

³ <http://www.ezilon.com/maps/asia/kyrgyzstan-physical-maps.html>

KEP issued this “Fauna of Kyrgyzstan” set on 19 November 2014. Vladimir Melnic designed all four stamps. KEP printed 15,000 copies of this stamp. The issue numbers in this this early stamp set issue were relatively high. KEP has gradually reduced the print runs over the years for each issue to between 5,000-10,000 stamps, though, at the same time, KEP has increased the number of sets issued.

As is common with most KEP issues, the philatelic offering also included maximum cards and a mini-sheet that featured all four of the stamps, which also included: The Snow Leopard (250); the Central Asian Ibex (125) and the Yak (25). KEP also offered an FDC which has additional artwork (featuring the snow leopard in this instance), though the postmark features the Saker Falcon.

The **Saker Falcon** is one of the world’s “Endangered” species, with just 12,200-29,800 mature birds estimated globally, based on national populations. The global population is thought to be in decline, owing to a variety of factors, including electrocution on power lines, capture for the falconry trade, habitat degradation and use of agricultural chemicals⁴.

At international level, Governments have taken steps to address the threats to the Saker Falcon, via the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Convention on Migratory Species. The signatories to the Convention have adopted (in 2014-16) a Global Action Plan to protect the Saker Falcon and in particular:

‘to re-establish a healthy and self-sustaining wild Saker Falcon population throughout its range, and to ensure that any use is sustainable’.

This Action Plan is a long-term initiative that will run for 10 years, with regular reporting through to 2026.⁵ The “use” referred to in the overall objective is falconry, which involves countries in the Middle East, where the Saker Falcons migrate to in the winter, as well as falconry in the host countries in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Illegal trafficking of Saker Falcons for falconry purposes is one of the serious threats to the status of this bird⁶.

2015 Traditional Kyrgyz Hunting – Salbuurun

Golden Eagle



⁴ <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/saker-falcon-falco-cherrug/text>

⁵ https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms_scc-sc1_inf-3_saker-gap_e_0.pdf

⁶ <https://www.conservationfrontlines.org/2019/01/sustainable-conservation-of-the-saker-falcon/>

The next set of three stamps issued by KEP in 2015 features traditional Kyrgyz Hunting. This was the first set in a series of three on this Hunting theme, though no of the other two sets featured birds.

The first stamp in this set features a spectacular image of a **Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)** descending at speed towards its prey. The incongruity in the image though is the wrist shown on the right-hand side, which tells us that the Eagle has started its flight from the hand of a hunter, rather than from complete liberty.

The second stamp shows a **Saker Falcon** in flight, presumably on the look-out for some prey.

Falcon soaring



Falcon catching prey (or not)



The final stamp in the set shows a **Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)** in pursuit of its prey, in this instance a hare.

I remember this particular stamp when it first came out. As I am also a member of the Hare Preservation Trust, the image had me rooting for the hare, in the hope that it would be able to run fast enough to escape the clutches of the falcon. It is not an image I especially enjoy looking at, but I have to admit that it is intriguing because the artist leaves us wondering as to the outcome of the chase. Is it inevitable that the falcon succeeds in seizing the hare?

KEP issued this set of three on 14 May 2015. KEP made each stamp available in sheets of five stamps, as well as in a mini-sheet that featured all three stamps. Vladimir Melnic once again designed the stamps. KEP also made available maximum cards with all three designs alongside the FDCs.

KEP issued 10,000 of each stamp and 5,000 of each mini-sheet.

The miniature sheet also has a marginal picture of the Peregrine Falcon sitting on the hand of the hunter, which reinforces the point that in the third stamp (chasing the hare) that the Falcon has also started out from the wrist of the hunter.

2016 American Bald Eagle: Philatelic Issue – World Philatelic Exhibition, New York



KEP issued this souvenir sheet on 3 June for the Stamp Show in New York. Aliona Cojocari designed the sheet and KEP issued 10,000 of them.

I am not especially fond of these philatelic issues so I will pass over this one.

2016 Gyrfalcon (“Ak-shumkar”): 25th Anniversary of Kyrgyzstan’s Independence



On 30 August 2016, KEP issued this souvenir sheet to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the independence of the Kyrgyz Republic. The stamp features the Gyrfalcon, also known locally as the “Ak-shumkar” as a symbol of the nation. Vitaliu Pogolşa designed this stamp and KEP issued 7,000 of these stamp sheets.

The **Gyrfalcon** (*Falco rusticolus*) is the largest falcon in the world. It is 48-64 cm in length and has a wingspan of 123cm; and an average weight of 800-2100 grams, with the female being substantially larger than the male⁷.

Whilst the Gyrfalcon's plumage in this stamp sheet is grey, the Gyrfalcon does change the colour of its feathers depending on its location: the colouring variations run from white, silver, to brown and black. Gyrfalcons occur on arctic coasts and tundra; but after the breeding season (or in winter) some may disperse to new territory⁸. When they do migrate, the Gyrfalcon tends to aim for habitat that is similar to where it has come from: open fields, coastlines, dunes, prairie, and shrub steppe⁹.

One interesting fact that I discovered is that the Gyrfalcon is a solitary bird, which only interacts with its mate during the breeding season. The Gyrfalcon is diurnal and hunts by low flight across the ground, an approach which differs from other birds of prey. Gyrfalcons are strict carnivores and have a diet that includes birds and small mammals as well as fish¹⁰.

2018 Birds of Kyrgyzstan

On 22 May 2018, KEP issued this set of four stamps celebrating "Birds of Kyrgyzstan", all of which carry the Birdlife International logo. Daria Maier designed the stamps and KEP printed 8,000 of these stamps, which they issued in sheets of five, with a "coupon" located in the bottom right corner which contained a larger image of the bird design. KEP also produced 2,000 mini-sheets which featured all four birds. KEP also printed four maximum cards alongside the FDCs.

The background information issued by KEP that accompanies this issue¹¹ states:

"In Kyrgyzstan, there are 391 species of birds, many of which are rare and protected by the state. Some 57 species of birds are included in the Red Book of the Kyrgyz Republic. A new series of KEP postage stamps is dedicated to four species of birds inhabiting the territory of Kyrgyzstan."

Whilst all four birds appearing on these stamps have, in global terms, "Least Concern" status, the background information issued by KEP might suggest that their standing in the Kyrgyz Republic is somewhat less assured, if they are listed in the national Red Book [of threatened species].

The first stamp in the set, shows the **Ibisbill** (*Ibidorhyncha struthersii*) which the KEP background information says "is a large bird, related to the waders, with a long, bow-shaped and down-curved bill of bright red. This very rare, disappearing bird is listed in the Red Book of Kyrgyzstan".

To corroborate that information, further research indicates that the Ibisbill is 38-41 cm in length and weighs 270-320 grams, with the females being slightly larger than the males. The Ibisbill generally prefers to live in habitats that are characterised by stony or shingle silt and sand based river-beds, as

⁷ <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Gyrfalcon/id>

⁸ <http://animalia.bio/gyrfalcon>

⁹ <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Gyrfalcon/id>

¹⁰ <http://animalia.bio/gyrfalcon>

¹¹ <https://www.stamps.kg/news/newsletter-no-37.html> The Birdlife International's estimate of bird species present in Kyrgyzstan is 329.

are found in the mountainous regions of Central Asia. The Ibisbill feeds on invertebrates, fish and grasshoppers that it finds in the slow-moving waters and streams of the riverbeds, using its long-curved bill to probe beneath the rocks, gravel and mud¹².

Ibisbill



There are not many other Ibisbill stamps available: www.birdtheme.org indicates that, in addition to KEP, just Bhutan issued a stamp featuring this bird, so it should be short work to construct a complete collection of this bird.

The second bird in this set is of the **Eastern Rock Nuthatch** (*Sitta tephronota*), which the KEP Newsletter states “is a typical inhabitant of mountainous areas. It easily climbs the rocks and can even stay upside down”.

Further research indicates that this bird grows to 16-18cm in length and generally lives in arid, rocky terrain but when in breeding season, prefers to be in riverbanks or tree holes. The Rock Nuthatch feeds on insects, and snails that it finds through foraging the rock terrain¹³.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch



The third bird in the set is the **Demoiselle Crane** (*Anthropoides virgo*) which the KEP information indicates is “the smallest species of crane. These elegant, migratory birds prefer to settle in open territories at an altitude of up to 3,000 m above sea level. This species is listed in the Red Book of the Kyrgyz Republic”.

Information from the International Crane Foundation (ICF)¹⁴ indicates that the Demoiselle has a height of 89cm and weighs a hefty 2-3kg. Globally there are 170,000-200,000 of these birds, but in

¹² <https://animalcorner.org/animals/ibisbill-bird/>

¹³ <https://www.beautyofbirds.com/easternrocknuthatches.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.savingcranes.org/species-field-guide/demoiselle-crane/>

Central Asia there are three sub-populations which number in the tens of thousands. The Demoiselle feeds on a diet of plants, peanuts, cereal grains and insects.

Demoiselle Crane



The Demoiselle Crane does face threats from habitat loss, changes in agricultural practices, changes in the course of rivers and installation of dams, human disturbance and illegal hunting, capture and poisoning by humans. The ICF has put in place a surveillance project to monitor populations as they migrate from Central Asia to Southern Asia (India) in winter.

Eurasian Eagle-owl



The fourth stamp in this set has an impressive image of the **Eurasian Eagle-owl** (*Bubo bubo*) coming into land. The KEP Newsletter states that this bird “is considered the king of all owls. He has a powerful physique and lives in forests, steppes, deserts, on all plains and in mountains. As a protected bird, the Eurasian eagle-owl is listed in the Red Book of Kyrgyzstan”.

Eagle-owls are 58-71cm in length, with a wingspan of 405-515cm and a weight of between 1550-4200grams. The female is heavier than the male. The Eagle-owl likes rocky landscapes and normally roots in daytime in rock crevices. The Eagle-owl “eats almost anything that moves”, from beetles to mammals, as well as other birds and some reptiles and amphibians (snakes, lizards and frogs). The Eagle-owl is mostly active between dusk and dawn¹⁵.

¹⁵ <https://www.owlpages.com/owls/species.php?s=1240>

2019 Little Bustard - Bird of the Year 2019



KEP issued this one stamp on 9 May 2019 as part of a new annual series on “Bird of the Year”, in cooperation with the Kyrgyz Wildlife Conservation Society (KWCS), which KEP has asked to nominate each year the bird to be commemorated. In choosing the Little Bustard, the KWCS selected a bird which has a “Near Threatened” conservation status.

KEP issued 6,000 of these stamps, which were available in a mini-sheet of four stamps. KEP also produced the usual maximum cards and FDC to support the issue.

Daria Maier designed this stamp.

KEP’s background information on this issue states that:

*“The Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*) is a relatively small bird, about the size of a grouse and weighs up to 1kg. The distinctive feature in the appearance of the Little Bustard is that the male, when in breeding plumage, has a black neck with two white stripes.”*

From background reading, it would seem that the worldwide distribution of the Little Bustard is split into two sub-populations, with one based around the Iberian Peninsula, France, Sardinia and South East Italy; and the other in Central Asia.¹⁶

The threats to the Little Bustard are familiar: loss of habitat, collisions with power lines and hunting. Conservation efforts would seem to be based on monitoring and quantifying the population size¹⁷.

2020 The White-browed tit-warbler: Bird of the Year 2020

For the 2020 bird of the year, the KWCS selected the impressive **White-browed tit-warbler** (*Leptopoecile sophiae*) which has feathers that are coloured in shades of purple, mauve, blue and grey that most have a “rainbow” effect. What gives the bird its name is the white plumage that sweeps back from each eye to the back of its head. In terms of size, the tit-warbler is a small bird, measuring just 8.5-10.0cm¹⁸.

¹⁶ <http://www.planetepassion.eu/BIRDS-IN-FRANCE/Little-Bustard-Tetrax-tetrax-Outarde-conservation-france.html>

¹⁷ <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/little-bustard-tetrax-tetrax/text>

¹⁸ <https://blog.therainforestsitesite.greatergood.com/white-browed-tit-warbler/>



KEP issued the second of its “Bird of the Year” series on 17 December 2020, featuring the White-browed tit-warbler. The information provided by KEP on this bird states:

“The White-browed tit-warbler (Leptopoecile sophiae) is a rare, non-migratory bird of Kyrgyzstan. This is one of the smallest representatives of Kyrgyz fauna. The White-browed tit-warbler is found in shrub lands of the Tian Shan Mountains, in the Jungar Alatau and other mountain ranges in Middle and Central Asia and at altitudes of 2,400 to 4,000 meters above sea level.

The White-browed tit-warbler has a pretty appearance. These birds have a diverse range of colours: sky-blue, blue, purple and reddish. All this, together with its fluffy plumage and relatively long tail, attracts a lot of attention from bird connoisseurs.”

The stamp is available in a sheet of five stamps with an added coupon in the bottom left (featuring an enlarged image of the bird).

KEP printed 5,000 of this stamp which Daria Maier designed. KEP also produced maximum cards and FDCs to support this issue.

I have included the FDC below just to show the quality of the design on these envelopes, which complements the stamp image.



Other Information on KEP and Beyond

Kyrgyz Express Post has an accessible website (in English) which contains a good deal of information on each issue, with each stamp set supported by informative Newsletters. The website is here:

<https://www.stamps.kg/stamps.html>

The WOPA website also has KEP on it and provides similar information:

<https://www.wopa-plus.com/en/stamps/member/&loc=KG>

The WOPA website also offers stamps from the legacy postal operator, Kyrgyzstan Post (KP), which also offers bird stamps. The link to this page is here:

<https://www.wopa-plus.com/en/stamps/member/&loc=KG2>

Available stamp issues are from 2016 onwards. Birds stamps that are on offer include a colourful four-stamp set featuring the Dalmatian Pelican (2017):



Image source: www.wopa-plus.com

Despite the name, the Dalmatian Pelican is present in Kyrgyzstan and has “Near Threatened” status. This is a popular bird on stamps and I have already penned a few lines on it in my piece on Bird Stamps of Macedonia (Part One), so will not repeat that material here. This is yet another issue includes the WWF logo, but a search on the WWF website does not elicit very much information on this bird or on WWF’s activities to support its continued existence.

Of less interest from KP is a 2019 issue on Poultry, featuring ducks.

All stamp images are from the KEP website: <https://www.stamps.kg/stamps.html> except where stated.