

Bird Symbols of Canada

Part 10

Newfoundland and Labrador

Provincial Bird: Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula artica*)

The website of the Executive Council of Newfoundland and Labrador indicates that the Atlantic Puffin became the Provincial bird in 1991. The website goes on to provide an overview of the characteristics of this bird:

“With a thick orange, yellow, and grey bill and stout body, the puffin is able to fly in the air as well as swim underwater, and its razor-sharp claws allow it to dig deep burrows into the rich soil of seabird islands. It lays a single egg at the bottom of this protective burrow. Both parents nurture until the chick is ready for life at sea in late August or early September. Ninety-five per cent of North America’s Atlantic Puffins are found in this province.”¹

The Canada Government website indicates that the largest colony of the Puffins can be found on the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, south of St John’s. The reserve comprises four small islands, which provide a home to the Puffins, as well as other seabirds, during nesting season and beyond, for the birds to raise their young. The islands are off-limits to human visitors (tourists).

In addition to the Atlantic Puffin, Newfoundland and Labrador also has two designated Provincial Game Birds, the **Willow Ptarmigan** (*Lagopus lagopus*) and the **Rock Ptarmigan** (*Lagopus muta*). The Executive Council has this to say about these birds:

*“Willow Ptarmigan (**Lagopus lagopus**) and Rock Ptarmigan (**Lagopus muta**) are found throughout the province. The Willow Ptarmigan is a more sedentary species; the Rock Ptarmigan adopts a seasonal camouflage. Found primarily in barrens and high country, the partridge epitomizes the open wilderness. It is an arctic bird; the Burin and Avalon peninsulas may be the most southern, naturally occurring extremity for the bird’s range in North America.”²*

There is no shortage of interesting information about the Atlantic Puffin. Here is a summary of what Nature Canada has to say:

- The Puffin can capture and carry many small fish at a time. The serrated beaks are hinged in such a way that allow the top and bottom halves to meet at different angles; and the tongue can hold caught fish against the palate, whilst the Puffin can then open its beak for additional fish;
- The Puffin carries its captured fish to the nest to feed its young, whilst other seabirds tend to consume their prey and then regurgitate the caught fish for their young;
- The Puffin can swim underwater for up to a minute, using their wings as fins and their feet as rudders; and

¹ <https://www.gov.nl.ca/exec/cabinet/protocol/symbols/>

² <https://www.gov.nl.ca/exec/cabinet/protocol/symbols/>

- The continued existence of the Puffins is threatened by pollution, overfishing (removal of their food source), invasive predators and climate change (affecting their breeding).³

The eBird Canada website also provides an interesting description of the Atlantic Puffin:

“Chunky seabird, the shape of a football. Black above and white below with pearly face and thick multicolored bill. Orange legs and feet. Nonbreeding and young birds show darker face and duller bill. In breeding season, rarely seen far from breeding colonies on rocky islands and cliffs in the North Atlantic. Winters on open ocean, almost never seen from land. Distinctive if seen well; the only puffin in its range.”⁴

Even allowing for the fact that the reference to a “football” is to the shape of one used by the Canadian Football League (CFL), I’m not sure that I would ever describe the Puffin as shaped like a football. Not that there is a CFL team in Newfoundland and Labrador either.

The eBird website also explains where you might find the Atlantic Puffin: essentially the North East coast of Canada; the far North East coastline of the United States; the South Western Coast of Greenland, Iceland, the coastal areas of the British Isles, Norway and Sweden and in the Arctic.

Canada Post has issued two stamps that feature the Atlantic Puffin:

1996 Birds of Canada



Image source: www.birdtheme.org

This stamp comes from a set of four that Canada Post issued in 1996. There were further sets of four each year up to 2001, but this is the only time that Canada Post included the Puffin.

In 2010, Canada Post issued a colourful self-adhesive booklet which featured four different “Roadside Attractions” one of which was what looks like a cardboard (or fibreglass) cut-out of a Puffin on the beach. I haven’t included that stamp here, as there are plenty of Puffin stamps to choose from that I think are better than this one. It is available on www.birdtheme.org to view.⁵

One of the most impressive Puffin stamps from the gallery of those that are available (and globally, there are plenty of them) is from Canada Post’s 2016 mini-sheet issue (see below). The reason that I like this stamp is that it shows the Puffin in flight, something of a rarity amongst the selection that is available.

³ <https://naturecanada.ca/news/blog/discover-the-atlantic-puffin/>

⁴ <https://ebird.org/species/atlpuf>

⁵ <http://www.birdtheme.org/country/canada.html>

2016 [Provincial] Birds of Canada

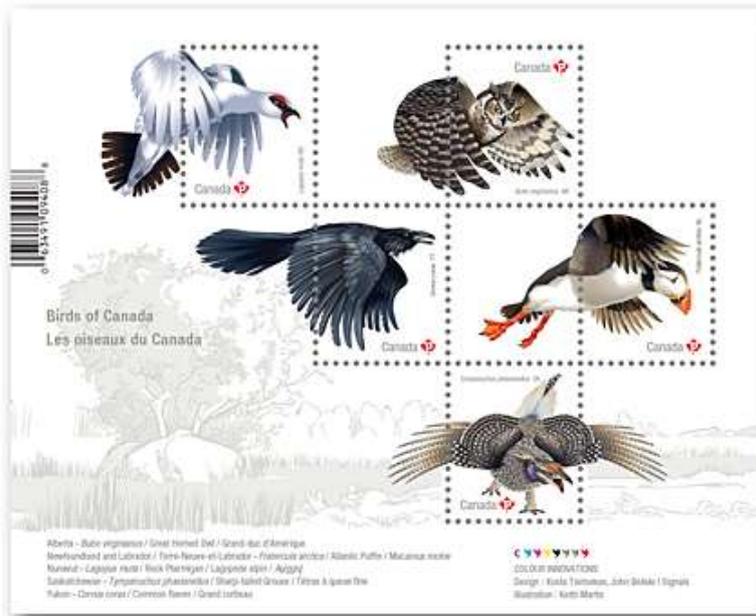


Image source: <https://www.canadapost.ca/>

The information provided by Canada Post on this issue indicates that designer and illustrator Keith Martin wanted to show the birds as static portraits. He stated:

*“I didn’t want the birds to appear passive,” he says of his decision to picture them in their most energetic moments. “Take-offs and landings were my opportunities.”*⁶

I believe that Keith Martin has achieved his objective of conveying a sense of movement in the mini-sheet, but in particular with the Puffin. I like too how the image crosses over into the central pane.

As previously mentioned, there is a good choice of Puffin stamps to select from, but many of these are from postal authorities that sit outside the natural range of this bird. I have limited my choice to those where you might naturally see the Puffin:

1980 Iceland – Marine Life



Image source: www.stampworld.com

This stamp comes from a set of three, the other two featuring a Redfish and a Harbour Seal.

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https://www.canadapost.ca/web/en/blogs/collecting/details.page?article=2016/07/12/birds_of_canada&cattype=collecting&cat=stamps

1997 Ireland - Birds



Image source: www.stampworld.com

This stamp is from An Post's definitive set of birds which was reissued on several occasions in different values. Mel West's "Collecting Complexity" explains further these issues (Flight, December 2019, Vol 34 No 2 and March 2020, Vol 34 No 3 refer).

2002 St Pierre et Miquelon – Puffin Airmail



Image source: www.stampworld.com

This is an airmail stamp which also shows the puffin in flight, as also unusually, with a beak full of fish.

2011 Jersey – Fauna – 75th Anniversary of the National Trust for Jersey



Image source: www.stampworld.com

This stamp is from a set of six, three of which featured birds.

As regards the Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Game Bird, there is one Canadian stamp that celebrates the **Willow Ptarmigan** (see below) which is from 2005 and part of a set of four to commemorate John James Audubon's "*Birds of America*". Globally, there are about a dozen stamps featuring this bird, some with the winter plumage as also shown below. I have not included any stamp images for the Rock Ptarmigan, as this is the Provincial Bird of Nunavut.

2005 Canada – John James Audubon – *Birds of America* Commemorative



Image source: www.birdtheme.org

2020 Belarus



Image source: <https://www.belpost.by/en/philately/catalog/5766>



Image source: <https://www.belpost.by/en/philately/catalog/5770>