

Burnt Fingers Again?

Fijian Definitive Overprints – Fire Sale Warning

In a message to Pacific Study Circle Society members, Bryan Jones, the editor of *Pacifica* the Society's journal, has advised that Post Fiji (PF) announced in late September that there would be a "fire sale" of stock from the bird definitive overprints. (Also see: "Perplexed in the Pacific").

He reports that the sale will be made up of forty eight complete sheets of the overprints remaining, and which the Philatelic Bureau had not intended to distribute to Fijian post offices. The sheets include the following overprinted values:

- 2c/31c – 4 sheets
- 5c/31c – 3 sheets
- 20c/31c – 4 sheets
- 1c/44c – 11 sheets
- 2c/44c – 2 sheets
- 4c/44c – 3 sheets
- 5c/44c – 9 sheets
- 6c/44c- 1 sheet
- 20c/44c – 4 sheets
- 20c/63c – 7 sheets

PF has said that under the terms of the sale, the sheets would not be broken up and only be sold as complete. Interestingly, they also advised that they would be sold at the original value and not the overprinted one. This would mean for example, that a sheet of the 20c/31c overprints at 100 stamps per sheet, would be sold at \$31 not \$20 and the 1c/44c would sell for \$44 not \$1!



Fig.1 – 20c/31c Striated Heron Fig.2 – 1c/44c Australasian Swamphen

A leading authority on the Fijian bird overprints, Bryan Jones has said that the majority of the sheets in the sale are "standard," but that they do include some varieties and errors which normally would have been burnt or pulped. He has flagged up of particular note the following:

- A single sheet of the 5c/44c with overprint inverted (sheet 16297);
- Nine of the eleven sheets of the 1c/44c being used for trials of different settings); and,
- Seven sheets from a trial printing on the 63c original with partial double overprints.

The advice of the sale comes with a serious warning for potential buyers. Some of the sheets with major errors have already been sold to a dealer and appeared on Ebay with significantly increased prices. He has cautioned that as there is now a distinct possibility that the major catalogues will either not list these items or consign them to the appendix, they would, in reality, be worth much less.

A quick trawl of Ebay reveals that there are certainly some wacky prices being asked for small marginal blocks of overprinted Fijian bird definitives. They range from between approximately £147 and £205 (including postage).

This all brings to mind the occasion when Papua New Guinea (PNG) made a printing mistake with its second series 1992 imprint Birds of Paradise set, stopped the issue, but not before a few sheets found their way onto the market. Dealers thought they were going to make a killing. But no. PNG forestalled this by then issuing them anyway a little later and the stamps were then only worth what was printed on them. Fingers were then burnt. I wonder if they could be again.

Mel West

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