

The Pre-stamped envelopes of the Birds of Canada Series

The postage stamps of the Birds of Canada series were issued annually between 1996 and 2001. There are six series altogether with four stamp designs per set, giving a total of twenty four stamps across the whole series.

Designed by Raymond Bellemare and illustrated in Acrylic by Pierre Leduc, the stamps are attractive and highly collectable. They can be found in sheet or strip form as well as individually, are common and relatively inexpensive to purchase. The 1999 (4th) and 2001 (6th) series were also issued as self-adhesive booklets. They can be a little trickier to acquire, but I've seen them on ebay.



Sheet of the Birds of Canada 1st Series (1996)

The Postal Stationery

Equally importantly, a large number of the stamps from the series were reproduced by Canada Post on pre-stamped envelopes - normally referred to as PSE's - and five designs appeared on postal cards in December 1998. Additionally, two of the stamps from previous series appeared on non-denominational (ND) pre-stamped envelopes in 2002. In total, 16 of the 24 stamps appeared on the standard PSE's and all the stationery products have the same stamp designer and the original illustrator.

The PSE's are particularly interesting because as well as reflecting postal rate changes over the period in which they were issued, they also show small, sometimes quite subtle changes in design. The stationery utilised only two Canadian postal envelope sizes: Size 8 (164x92mm) and Size 10 (242x105mm). All the envelopes had gummed flaps except the 2002 issues which were self-adhesive with a removable protective waxed paper strip.

The bird designs from each series were not distributed evenly across the PSE issues. All four of the 1st (1996) and 3rd (1998) series were utilised for stationery, but with others only two designs from each series were used annually. The exception was the 4th (1999) series where only the American Goldfinch featured but as one of the 2002 non-denominational "Domestic Letter mail" rate envelopes. It's odd that this series had a paucity of appearances, for as well as the Goldfinch there were equally fine illustrations for the Northern Goshawk, Red-winged Blackbird and Sandhill Crane.

I mentioned the subtle design changes. The 1st Series PSEs have a vignette line of coloured dots which are interrupted by the stamp design and are then continued with the value of 45 cents in black. Just below the value, the words, "CANADA," and then "POSTAGE" in English and French, each run vertically. The bird images are not constrained by their stamp border and elements intrude onto white

space. The words "FROM/DE" sit just below the dots, and "TO/A" just above the three address lines. Six dotted postal code boxes are placed beneath the stamps. The reverse of each envelope has information about the bird species with text in English repeated in French.

This design arrangement is repeated for the 2nd and 3rd series PSE issues, except the 2nd has small diamonds instead of dots and two of the 3rd have inverted triangles. The birds stay entirely within the image box.

However, things become a little complicated after this. Because of an increase in postage rates to 46 cents, the remaining two designs from the 3rd series were issued in late 1998 and again in 1999. The line of dots, diamonds or triangles are dispensed with. "CANADA" is placed within a box to the left of the stamp and the value is placed in a small box to the right of the stamp. The Great Crested Flycatcher* from the 3rd series can be found in three versions (all on size 10 envelopes):-

- Type I – Issued December 1998 with pointed flap and value of 46c in a barely readable bluish-green;
- Type II – Issued May 1999 with square flap and the value also in bluish-green.
- Type III – Issued sometime later in 1999 (flap not described) but this time with the value sensibly reversed in white.

The Hairy Woodpecker that accompanied the Flycatcher was on a size 8 envelope and the value in its box is a pale, insipid yellow. White would have worked better.

The 5th and 6th series retained these design changes, but all the value boxes are sensibly white on darkish grey. The 6th series also had a further postal rate change, this time to 47 cents. The sender wording changes to, "FROM/EXP" and the address wording to, "TO/DEST." Additionally, the 5th and 6th series PSE's have bar codes on either the left or right side of the reverse.

The two non-denominational PSE's in size 8 and 10 followed in February 2002 with stamp designs from previous series. The "CANADA" box is now bluish-grey and they have a red half Maple leaf symbol over the right side of the stamp image followed by the wording "DOMESTIC LETTERMAIL/POSTES-LETTRES DU REGIME INTERIEUR." The reverse of each envelope again has a bar code which now appears to be standard.



The 2002 Non-denominational (Size: 10) Scarlet Tanager

As well as the PSE's, five postal cards were issued in 1998 without values and were inscribed "POSTAGE PAID/PORT PAYE." These cards comprised the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Atlantic Puffin and Pileated Woodpecker from the 1st series, as well as the Great Crested Flycatcher and Western Screech Owl from the 3rd series.

Further details of the pre-stamped envelopes issues across all six series are contained in the table below.

Basic Table of Birds of Canada Series Pre-stamped Envelopes

| Series | Issue Date | Birds Illustrated | Size | Value | Key Design Features |
|--------|----------------|---------------------------|------|-------|--|
| 1 | 1996 – Jan 9 | Atlantic Puffin | 10 | 45c | Olive green dots at top/val. Blk |
| 1 | 1996 – Jan 9 | Pileated Woodpecker | 8 | 45c | Green dots at top/val. Blk |
| 1 | 1996 – July 25 | American Kestrel | 10 | 45c | Burnt orange dots at top/val. Blk |
| 1 | 1996 – July 25 | Ruby-throated Hummingbird | 8 | 45c | Carmine dots at top/val. Blk |
| 2 | 1997 – Jan 10 | Mountain Bluebird | 10 | 45c | Blue diamonds along top/val. Blk |
| 2 | 1997 – Jan 10 | Western Grebe | 8 | 45c | Olive green diamonds at top/val. Blk |
| 3 | 1998 – Mar 13 | Eastern Screech Owl | 10 | 45c | Inverted olive green triangles at top/val. Blk |
| 3 | 1998 – Mar 13 | Grey-crowned Ruby Finch | 8 | 45c | Inverted burnet orange triangles/val. Blk |
| 3 | 1998/99 | Hairy Woodpecker | 8 | 46c | No line dots/"46" yellow in grey box |
| 3 | 1998/99 | Great Crested Flycatcher* | 10 | 46c | No line dots/"46" bluish green or white in grey box. Three types. (see text) |
| 5 | 2000 – Mar 1 | Canada Warbler | 8 | 46c | No dots/white value in grey box |
| 5 | 2000 – Mar 1 | Blue Jay | 10 | 46c | No dots/white value in grey box |
| 6 | 2000 – Dec 28 | Golden Eagle | 10 | 47c | No dots/value in bluish-grey box |
| 6 | 2000 – Dec 28 | Lapland Longspur | 8 | 47c | No dots/value in bluish-grey box |
| 2 | 2002 – Feb 15 | Scarlet Tanager | 10 | ND | Red maple leaf/Domestic lettermail |
| 4 | 2002 – Feb 15 | American Goldfinch | 8 | ND | Red maple leaf/Domestic lettermail |

Mel West

October 2021