

## Vatican City

### 2021 Europa Endangered National Wildlife

#### Introduction

Yesterday, I went to Powfoot to birdwatch and to stroll along the sea front. Powfoot is in Dumfries and Galloway, located just West of Annan. It provides a good spot to view both sea birds on the Solway Estuary and garden birds in the village. Powfoot is also close to the Eastern boundary of the Caerlaverock National Nature Reserve. Another curiosity worth seeing is the Victorian swimming pool, located on the beach but only visible at low tide. Coincidentally, Bird Watching magazine had also recommended Powfoot as one of its places to visit this month.

The day's highpoint was seeing a Wren balancing right on the end of a vertical branch of a bramble, chirping away as the branch swayed gently in the breeze. How the Wren was able to keep its balance right on the tip of the branch and sing at the same time I do not know, but to me, that scene was both charming and wondrous.

#### Vatican City Wren – 2021 Europa Issue

That vision of the wren balancing on a branch reminded me that the Vatican City had also issued a two-stamp set for its 2021 Europa entry on “Endangered National Wildlife”, one of which features the Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), as illustrated below:

#### Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)



Source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

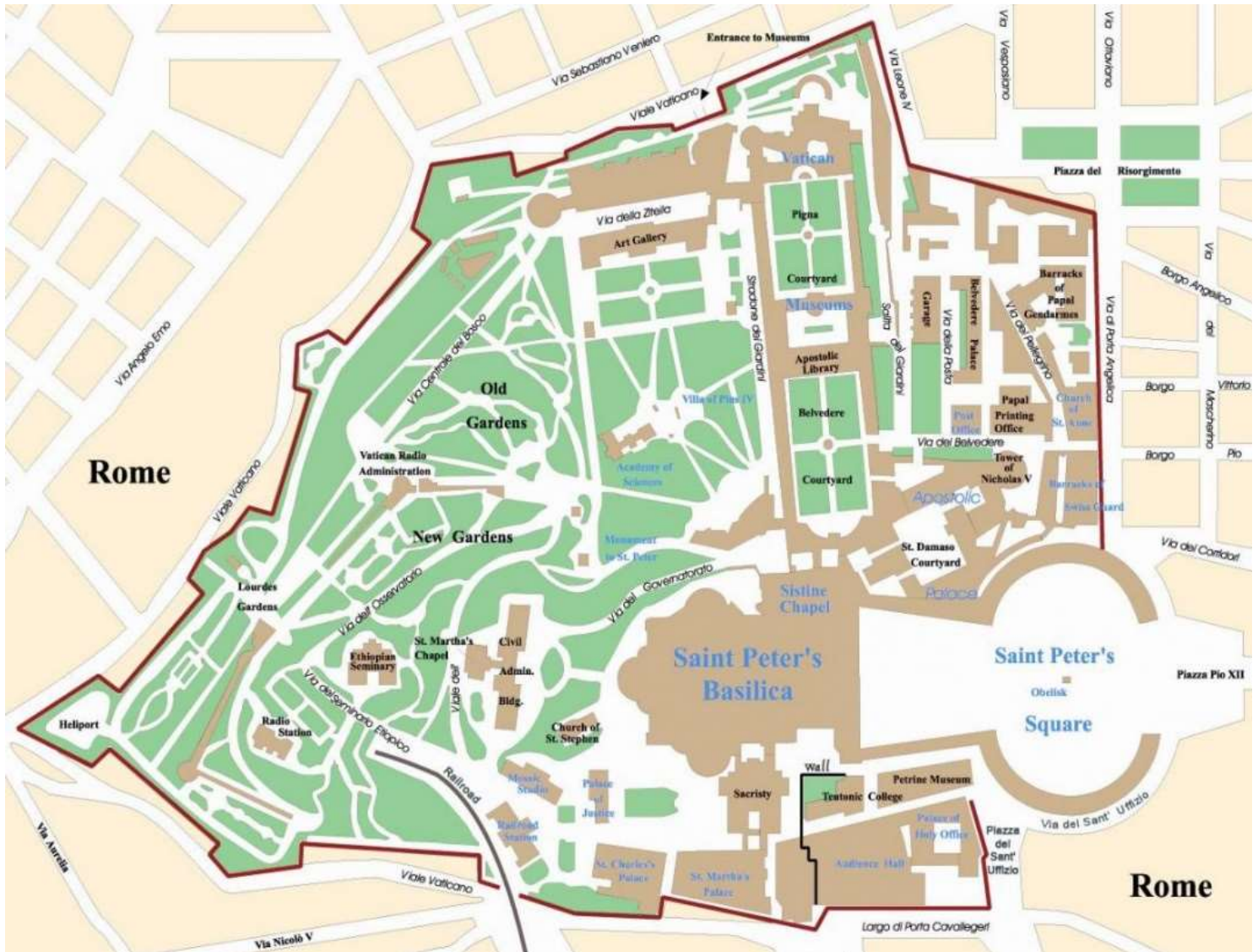
As I rather like this Wren design, I thought that it would be worth doing a short feature on this stamp issue.

The background information published by the Vatican for this issue starts out by stating:

*“For the realization of the Europa 2021 series dedicated to endangered national wildlife, we look at the avifauna populating the Vatican Gardens, a small natural oasis consisting of roughly 30 hectares.”<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.cfn.va/en/home/2555-25-05-2021-europa-2021-fauna-selvatica.html>

I thought that it would be useful at this point to see the extent of the Vatican Gardens, in relation to the more public domain of St Peter's Square. The map below provides this wider perspective:



Map of the Vatican City State

Source: <https://it.maps-vatican.com/vaticano-sulla-mappa>

This visual of the Vatican State as a whole gives an idea of the greenery available for wildlife to take up residency, including birds. The idea for the Vatican gardens apparently dates from 1279. Pope Niccolò III (1277-1280) provided the impetus for establishing them: requiring the creation of an orchard (pomarium), meadow (pratulum) and a tree-garden (viridarium) as a place of meditation and relaxation. The present gardens have evolved from that starting point.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.vaticanstate.va/it/monumenti/altri-monumenti/giardini-vaticani.html>. The Latin reference to meadow is "pratellum" in the text, which I couldn't find in the dictionary.

The Vatican gardens, whilst existing in an essentially urban environment, have provided a place for some wildlife. Amongst the birds reported there are: Peregrine Falcon, Kestrel (see below), Blue Rock Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Redstart, Cetti's Warbler, Stonechat, Blackcap, Whitethroat and Starlings.<sup>3</sup>

About the Wren stamp, the Vatican Numismatic and Philatelic Office states the following:

*"The €1.15 value depicts the wren, a passerine bird around 10 cm long, the smallest of the Troglodyte family. Predominantly sedentary, it lives in locations abundant with bushes and trees. It is not particularly intimidated by the presence of humans and can be found along garden paths and near houses, while in summer it prefers areas of parks offering shade."*<sup>4</sup>

The second stamp (€1.10 value) in the set illustrates the Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) as below:

**Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)**



Source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

About the Kestrel, the background description states the following:

*"The common kestrel, among the smallest Italian birds of prey with a length of just 35 cm and a 70-90 cm wingspan, is a stationary breeder, migrant and winterer."*<sup>5</sup>

The Vatican's Numismatic and Philatelic Office (NPO) issued 33,000 of these stamps. Perhaps the reduced issue number (compared to the 2019 Europa issue) perhaps reflect the diminished expectations during the Covid era.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://www.listofcountriesoftheworld.com/vt-animals.html> An alternative listing, based on public sightings, is available at: <https://ebird.org/region/VA>. This is equally comprehensive.

<sup>4</sup> Source: <https://www.cfn.va/en/home/2555-25-05-2021-europa-2021-fauna-selvatica.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cfn.va/en/home/2555-25-05-2021-europa-2021-fauna-selvatica.html>

## Postal Stationery Issue

Another issue this year (22 February) is this philatelic envelope which depicts the Pope smiling as a sparrow perches on his extended finger. The image is intended to convey the message: “To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope”.<sup>6</sup>

## Postal Stationary



Source: <https://www.cfn.va/en/140-2021>

The NPO has issued 16,000 of these envelopes.

<sup>6</sup> Source: <https://www.cfn.va/en/home/2540-22-02-2021-busta-filatelica-2021.html>



Source: Vatican City Philatelic and Numismatic Office

### Previous Bird Stamp Issues

There are not too many bird stamps from the Vatican City Numismatic and Philatelic Office (NPO). The most recent, other than this year, were the two stamps issued in 2019 as part of the Birds Europa theme. Our Editor (Gilly Christmas) highlighted the two stamps in that issue in the September 2019 edition of Flight (Volume 34 No 1), but I have included below an image of the First Day Cover (FDC):

I quite like the design of these two stamps, featuring the Mallard and Rock Dove. The NPO's commentary on this issue states:

*"The series consists of two values designed by Daniela Fusco showing a mallard duck on the value of € 1.10 and a pigeon on the value of € 1.15. The mallard, with a green head and silver body, belongs to the Anatidae family and is considered the progenitor of most of the duck's domestic breeds that populate gardens and Vatican fountains. The pigeon, better known as the Western wild pigeon, is a fairly widespread species of Columbids; from its domestic form Columba livia domestica, which includes the traveling pigeons and numerous ornamental breeds, descend the semi-wild pigeons widespread in almost the entire world, especially in the squares of the big cities, like our own St. Peter's Square."*<sup>7</sup>

Daniela Fusco (coin and stamp designer) is responsible for the images on these stamps, which the NPO issued in quantities of 60,000.

The Vatican's previous issue to the 2019 Europa stamps dedicated to "National Birds", dates from 1989, when the NPO issued a set of eight stamps featuring bird paintings, presumably from the Vatican art collection, though I have not yet been able to substantiate this.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cfn.va/en/home/2360-19032019-europa-2019.html>

I have included below one stamp from this set of eight, illustrating the Goldcrest and once again the Wren.

**Goldcrest and Wren (1989)**



Source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

For those bird stamp collectors that are interested in the peace dove on stamps, then the Vatican does offer a few examples, as illustrated below:

**Airmail Stamp (1947) [Single stamp from a set of seven airmail definitives]**



Source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

This stamp also came in a One lire value (red) with exactly the same design.

**Pope Francis with Animals (2020) [Single stamp from a set of four]**



Source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

This stamp is from a set of four (issued on 14 February 2020) which celebrates the Pontificate of Pope Francis. Through this stamp issue, Pope Francis highlights:

*“how human life is grounded in three fundamental relationships: with God, with neighbour and with the earth. Each creature has its own role, none is superfluous and everything is “a caress of God”, recalling that “every act of cruelty towards any creature is contrary to human dignity”.*

*In line with the principles of respect, love and care towards every living being, the stamps that make up the philatelic series, corresponding to the four prices for priority mail (1.10, 1.15, 2.40 and 3 Euros), portray the Pope next to various animal species.<sup>8</sup>*

The NPO has issued 120,000 of these sets, so that the €1.15 value should be easy to find.

### Endnote

To bring this article to a close, here is the First Day Cover for the 2021 Europa issue, featuring both the Kestrel and the Wren:



Source: Vatican City Numismatic and Philatelic Office

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<sup>8</sup> Source: <https://www.cfn.va/en/home/2433-14-02-2020-pont-papa-francesco-mmxx.html>