

Costa Rica: Franking or Postage Labels

Introduction

This article deals with postage labels issued by Correos Costa Rica. The two franking labels that we focus on here illustrate two birds: the Red-legged Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*) and the Coppery-headed Emerald (*Microchera cupreiceps*).

These two labels come from a set of four, with the two other labels making up the set of wildlife endemic to Costa Rica. For completeness, the other two labels illustrate:

- The Black-speckled Palm Pit Viper (*Bothriechis nigroviridis*);¹ and
- A Jumping Spider (*Phiale Formosa*) from the Salticidae family.

Some years ago, my sister once went on one of these adventurous rainforest holidays in Costa Rica. When she made the booking, I don't think that she had fully appreciated that Costa Rica is home to over 100 species of snake, some 20 of which are venomous. Equally, Costa Rica is home to some of the world's most dangerous spiders. Anyway, I am pleased to say that she returned safely home without having encountered either. The Isle of Man is about as exotic as it gets for me (it's snake free). But back to the birds.

The Franking Labels

Issue Information

I am indebted to the specialist magazine *Variable*, produced by the Variable Value Stamps Study and Collecting Group (ATEEME),² for most of the information indicated below about these franking labels. In summary:

- The creator of the four labels is Christian Ramirez Vargas, the graphic designer of Correos Costa Rica, using photographs by three local photographers;
- The printing of the labels (in rolls of 1,500) was completed by R R Donnelly de Costa Rica SA, producing the labels with a high gloss finish on the design area;
- The dimensions of the labels is 57 x 27 mm, with each label having die-cut vertical wavy edges, as a security measure;
- Also, to protect against counterfeiting, each label also has two curved security slits (running sideways), much like the curved slits on Royal Mail's Machin definitive stamps (not much help if you don't live in the UK, I know);
- The franking labels are available in a range of postal values, from 445 colones for domestic mail, to 840 colones for international mail (Zone 4). These rates prevailed from 25 October 2017.

¹ English name from: the Global Biodiversity Information System, <https://www.gbif.org/species/2444670>

² Source: www.ateeme.net Information from Variable No 61, published July 2021, pages 24-31.

With regard to the postal rates, note that after 1 July 2019, Costa Rica introduced Value added Tax (VAT) which raised prices by 13 per cent, so that the above base rates increased to 502.85 colones and 949.20 colones.

Correos Costa Rica raised prices again from 13 February 2020, so that the domestic tariff increased to 531.20 colones; with the international Zone 4 rate increasing to 1,000.05 colones with four intermediate rates for other regions of the world: 689.30 colones (Central America, Zone 1); 751.45 colones (North & South America, Zone 2); 689.30 colones (Europe, Zone 3, standard), 813.60 colones (Europe, Zone 3, priority).

Issue dates for the labels are hard to pin down, as Correos Costa Rica do not treat them as philatelic issues, but for normal postal operations (that has to be a good thing). Variable reports the earliest known date for the Red-legged Honeycreeper label as May 2018; and for the Coppery-headed Emerald, July 2021.

The Bird Labels

Coppery-headed Emerald (*Microchera cupreiceps*)³

I originally came across this particular label in researching recent postage label issues from Israel Post. I came across what I initially thought was a single issue from Costa Rica from July 2021, which illustrates the Coppery-headed Emerald (*Microchera cupreiceps*).

Coppery-headed Emerald (July 2021)



Image source: www.ateeme.net

This bird has not previously featured on stamps from Costa Rica, a country which is distinguished by its rather limited bird stamp output. That modest output is slightly odd, given that Costa Rica is home (temporary or otherwise) to some 840 bird species. Plenty to choose from there.

But back to the Coppery-headed Emerald, about which eBird states:

"Is a small hummingbird with obviously decurved bill. Male mostly glittering green with coppery crown and bright white outer tail feathers; female similar but with white underparts. Bill shape and white outer tail feathers are enough for identification. Found in forests and edges, usually singly but males sometimes gather to display."

³ In Spanish: Esmeralda de Coronilla Cobriza

The Coppery-headed Emerald is found in Costa Rica alone, one of nine endemic birds. It has “least concern” status. Birdlife International indicates that the population of birds is around 20,000-50,000.⁴ Perhaps this endemic status is one reason that Correos Costa Rica decided to commemorate the Coppery-headed Emerald on a postage label.

I found that the ATEEME (www.ateeme.net), the specialist group that studies franking labels available from self-service machines, had also created its own postcard available for this Costa Rican label, an image of which appears below:

Coppery-headed Emerald on ATEEME postcard



Image source: postcard created by www.ateeme.net, image of card from author’s collection

Note that the date of the postmark is not the first day of issue. The postmark refers to the Correos branch office located at the Supreme Court of Justice, in the capital San José. The value of the label (shown just under the top edge of the postmark) is 502.85 colones, about 60 pence at the current exchange rate, or 70 centimes (Euro), or 70 cents (US Dollars).

The Coppery-headed Emerald has appeared on just one other stamp, also issued in 2021 by the Inter-Governmental Philatelic Corporation (IGPC) for Guyana. The stamp (illustrated below) was one of six that appeared in a sheetlet celebrating Hummingbirds (*Trochilidae*). The Birdlife Data Zone for Guyana lists well over 30 hummingbirds which can be found in Guyana; but for whatever reason, this particular sheetlet doesn’t incorporate any one of them. The Coppery-headed Emerald, which as we have already established, is particular to Costa Rica.

⁴ Source: <http://www.datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/coppery-headed-emerald-elvira-cupreiceps>

Guyana (21 June 2021)



Image source: www.birdtheme.org

Red-legged Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*)⁵

Correos Costa Rica has had a modest issuing policy with regard to its postage labels, with no more than one or two new designs each year. Tracking back from 2021, I then found that in 2018 the postal authority issued just a single design, illustrating the Red-legged Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*).

The eBird description of this bird is as follows:

“Small, warbler-like tanager of tropical lowlands. Favours forest edge, woodland, and semi-open areas with taller trees. Often occurs in small groups, sometimes larger flocks, usually in the canopy of flowering trees, where it probes for nectar with its long bill. Red legs are bright on male, dullest on young birds. Male is blue in breeding plumage, with a turquoise cap; female and non-breeding male are greenish overall with faint streaking on the chest.”

The Red-legged Honeycreeper is found throughout Central America, as well as in Northern parts of South America, both inland as well as on the coast. This is the only image from the four species illustrated in this set of franking labels which shows wildlife that can be found beyond Central America.

The franking label issued by Correos Costa Rica is illustrated below:

Red-legged Honeycreeper (May 2018)



Image source: www.ateeme.net

⁵ In Spanish: Mielero Patirrojo

ATEEME also made available a postcard for this stamp, which is shown below:

Red-legged Honeycreeper on ATEEME created postcard

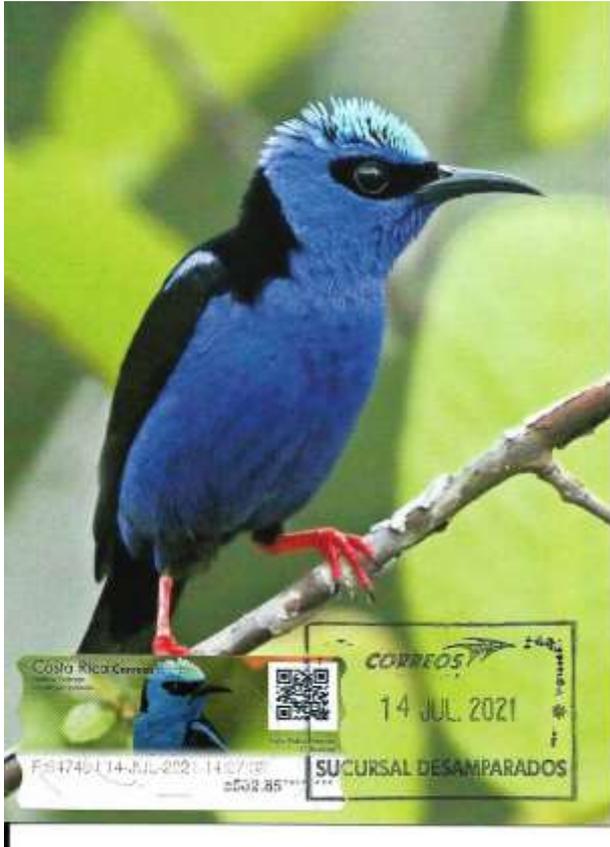


Image source: postcard created by www.ateeme.net, image of postcard from author's collection

Note that ATEEME created this postcard with the postage label in July 2021, so it is clearly not franked on the first day of issue. The postmark is the same as indicate above for the Coppery-headed Emerald, with the same value of 502.85 colones.

The Costa Rica postal authority has previously issued one stamp featuring the Red-legged Honeycreeper, back in 1984, as part of a set of six stamps illustrating birds:

Red-legged Honeycreeper (9 January 1984)



Image source: www.birdtheme.org

Conclusion

ATEEME specialist collectors of franking labels (www.ateeme.net) will also look at the machine printing of the values appearing on the labels and make distinctions between the font size, the ink colour and other characteristics of individual printers. I am not such an expert and I prefer to limit my scrutiny to the image on the label itself, so we will finish this article here.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful both to the ATEEME website and its publication (*Variable*) for the background information on the franking labels. I have also used the websites of the IUCN, eBird and the Global Biodiversity Information System and Birdlife International for information on the wildlife featured in this article. Finally, I am also grateful to www.birdtheme.org for the stamp images.