

# Nadia Charles – Draughtswoman

## Introduction

Prompted by recent issues from the French Southern and Antarctic Territories (Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises or TAAF for short<sup>1</sup>), this article considers the complete artwork on stamps that we have seen from Nadia Charles, illustrator, artist and draughtswoman.

Nadia Charles has done all of her philatelic artwork for the TAAF postal authority, which is based on the Isle of Réunion, which is also where Nadia Charles has her home. Since 1946, Réunion has enjoyed the status as a Department of the French State<sup>1</sup>. The island is located in the Indian Ocean, East of Madagascar and South West of Mauritius.

## Background

Nadia Charles has her own website<sup>2</sup> in which she explains her approach to her artwork:

*“Nadia Charles is a specialist in coloured and graphite pencil, applying her own original techniques combined with other graphic methods (using ink, felt pen, dry pastel and airbrush) to make drawings of a scientific nature. She has notably drawn illustrations for the National Museum of Natural History of Paris and the National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRA) in Réunion, as well as for the French Southern and Antarctic Territories (TAAF), including its postal authority.”*

The website also confirms that Nadia Charles has carried out numerous works on the flora and fauna of the Isle of Réunion, including both land based and aquatic fauna. She has also done multiple works of art based on daily life (portraits and scenery) of the different wildlife communities that can be seen in the various natural parks that can be found on Réunion, such artwork being commissioned by the various research and related bodies that are based on the island.<sup>3</sup> Nadia Charles’s work for the TAAF has included over 50 drawings for the French Antarctic Territory Nature Reserve and the TAAF Fishing Sector; as well as the eight stamp blocks for the TAAF postal authority.

Beyond the philatelic artwork, Nadia Charles has also done illustrations for various publishers, as well as commercial work for a range of enterprises in the communications sector. She also shares her artwork with the public at cultural exhibitions and in art studios.

What is the origin of Nadia Charles’s interest in drawing flora and fauna? In an article in Le Monde in 2020<sup>4</sup>, the following explanation appears:

*“From a very young age, I was fascinated by the work of researchers into animal behaviour and primates. These included Jane Goodall, working with Chimpanzees in Tanzania; Dian Fossey in her work with Gorillas in the mountains of Zaire and especially Biruté Galdikas working with the Orang-*

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.outre-mer.gouv.fr/la-reunion>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nadiacharles.fr>

<sup>3</sup> Including, amongst others: National Park of Hauts de la Réunion, the National Botanical Conservatory of Mascarin, Réunion Association for the Development of Fish-farming, the Saint Paul Lake Nature Reserve.

<sup>4</sup> Source: [https://www.lemonde.fr/mondephilatelique/article/2020/08/22/nadia-charles-un-timbre-reussi-est-un-timbre-qui-porte-au-reve\\_6049617\\_5470897.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/mondephilatelique/article/2020/08/22/nadia-charles-un-timbre-reussi-est-un-timbre-qui-porte-au-reve_6049617_5470897.html)

*Utans in Borneo; as well as the work of naturalist John Mackinnon ("In Search of the Red Ape"). All of these have been a great source of inspiration for me."*

Nadia Charles explains that she admired the artwork of naturalists Kim Donaldson and Peter Schouten, and was attracted to the illustrations that appeared in the Larousse Encyclopedias.

## The Bird Stamps

Nadia Charles's most recent stamp issue featuring a bird is the 2022 illustration of White-chinned Petrel, the latest in a series of single-stamp sheetlets that have appeared annually since 2018, starting with the Salvin's Prion, then the Flesh-footed Sheerwater (2019), the Amsterdam Albatross (2020), the Cormorants (2021). However, Nadia Charles's first issue was back in 2015, to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the TAAF, which comprised a three-stamp panorama (tryptic) which I have included at the end of this article.

The bird stamps start with the 2016 issue to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the TAAF Nature Reserve.

### 2016 10th Anniversary of the French Antarctic Territory Nature Reserve: six portraits of the Albatross (21 May)



Image source: [www.yvert.com](http://www.yvert.com)

Technical details: Perforations: 13.25 x 13. Printing: Offset. Printer: philaposte for the TAAF postal authority. Print run: 45,000 sheetlets.

Nadia Charles received the 2016 Grand Prix of Philatelic Art award for this sheetlet which illustrates portraits of the following six albatrosses from the Southern skies: Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea*

*exulans*), Amsterdam Albatross (*Diomedea amsterdamensis*), Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche chlororhynchos*), Black-browed Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophris*), Light-mantled Albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*) and Shy Albatross (*Thalassarche cauta*). A jury from the Chambre syndicale française des négociants et experts philatélique (CNEP) – a body similar to the Philatelic Trader’s Society – awarded the prize to Nadia Charles.

Nadia Charles explained the background to creating this particular stamp sheetlet. Prior to receiving the stamp commission, Nadia Charles had produced some 40 plus large format illustrations (A1 size) featuring birds, all in coloured crayon, which were for the TAAF’s Nature Reserve Information Panels. Nadia Charles said that she had a wide range of photos to work from, depicting this fascinating world. She found the “winged inhabitants” of the TAAF to be remarkable subjects to draw; and in particular was attracted to the heads and the detail of the beaks. From this work, Nadia Charles then compiled her own gallery of work. This work was the genesis of the commission that she received from the TAAF postal authority to create the commemorative bloc of six Albatrosses: initially, it started out as five Albatrosses and the White-chinned Petrel.<sup>5</sup>

From 2018, the TAAF postal authority has commissioned Nadia Charles to produce annually a sheetlet featuring birds of the Territory. One particular characteristic of the sheetlets that Nadia Charles has produced is that each bloc includes a short commentary about the birds, which has become more detailed (and informative) each year.

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Blog item by the Amicale Philatélique de Nanterre. <https://apn92.over-blog.fr/2016/11/grand-prix-de-l-art-philatelique-2016-nadia-charles-recompensee-le-bloc-becs-d-albatros-a-l-honneur.html>

**2018 Salvin's Prion (*Pachyptila salvini*) (2 January)**



Image source: [www.birdtheme.org](http://www.birdtheme.org)

Technical details: Perforations: 13 x 13.25. Printing: Offset. Printer: Philaposte for the TAAF postal authority. Print run: 36,000.

The commentary states: "The Salvin's Prion: a rare bird of Saint Paul's Island".

**2019 Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Ardenna carneipes*) (2 January)**

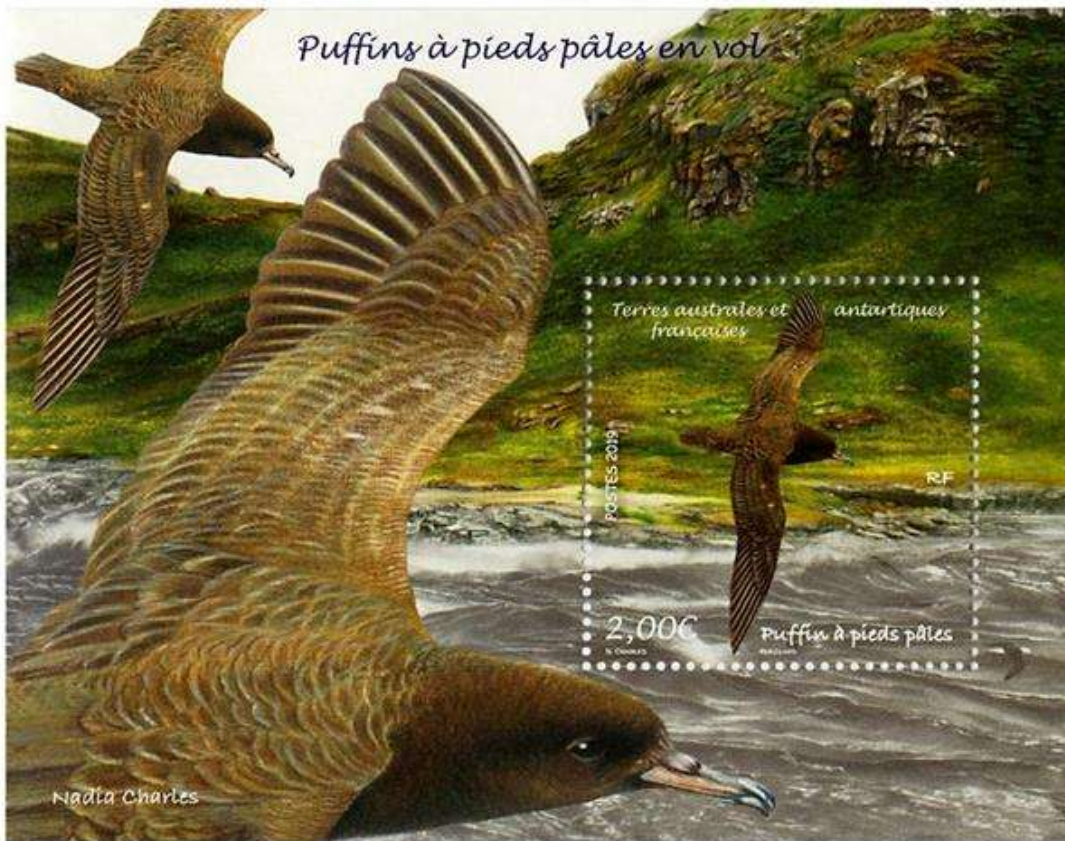


Image source: [www.yvert.com](http://www.yvert.com)

Technical details: Perforations: 13.25. Printing: Offset. Printer: Philaposte for the TAAF postal authority.

The commentary states: "The flesh-footed Shearwater in flight".

2020 Amsterdam Albatross (*Diomedea amsterdamensis*) (2 January)



Image source: [www.yvert.com](http://www.yvert.com)

Technical details: Sheet dimensions: 110mm x 87mm. Printing: Offset. Printer: Philaposte for the TAAF postal authority.

The commentary states: *“Lords of the Southern seas, the Amsterdam Albatross pairs are faithful for life, meet up together having spent a year travelling the Ocean.”*

The Amsterdam Albatross is one of the species regarded as at risk under the international “Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels”<sup>6</sup> (ACAP). Under that Agreement, the Amsterdam Albatross is classified as “Endangered”.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.acap.ag/>

**2021 Cormorants: Kerguelen Shag (*Leucocarbo verrucosus*) and Crozet Shag (*Leucocarbo melanogenis*) (2 January)**



Image source: [www.yvert.com](http://www.yvert.com)

Technical details: Sheet dimensions: 110mm x 87mm. Printing: Offset. Printer: Philaposte for the TAAF postal authority.

The commentary states: *“The slender Shags of Kerguelen and Crozet, with their blue ring around the eyes and the yellow flesh wattles above the beak are also recognisable by their white patches on the largely broad wings.”*

2022 White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) (2 January)



Image source: <https://www.laposte.fr/>

Technical details: Printer: Sheet dimensions: 110mm x 87mm. Stamp Size: 40mm x 40mm. Printing: Offset. Printer: Philaposte. Print run: 20,000.

The commentary states: *“The White-chinned Petrel, bloodhound of the skies, has tubular nostrils at the base of the beak, feeds on zoo plankton and only comes to ground at night to nest.”*

According to the Falklands Conservation, the White-chinned Petrel feeds on:

*“... on squid, crustaceans and fish, taken by diving from the air, or from the surface. It scavenges around ships and follow fishing trawlers taking offal and discard.”<sup>7</sup>*

Essentially the White-chinned Petrel feeds on what it can find on the water surface.

The White-chinned Petrel is also a protected species under the international Agreement for the Protection of Albatrosses and Petrels. It has “Vulnerable” status.

<sup>7</sup> <https://falklandsconservation.com/white-chinned-petrel/>



## Nadia Charles's other stamps for The French Southern and Antarctic Territories

### 2015 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the French Southern and Antarctic Territories



Image source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

Technical details: Perforations: 13. Printing: Offset, printed se-tenant. Printer: Philaposte. Print run: 55,000 of the series.

In her interview with Le Monde, Nadia Charles comments on this tryptic that in the third stamp, the logo of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary interrupts the horizon line which was supposed to connect the three stamps together: this is an example of one of the particular constraints of doing illustrations for stamps, in this instance where a place had to be found for the logo.

Apparently, the commission for these three stamps followed on (by a couple of years) the very first piece of work that Nadia Charles did for TAAF in 2013, which was to design some greetings cards, based around a panoramic view of the territory, from the Scattered islands to Adélie Land and then to the Southern Lands. This earlier work later formed the basis of the design for the three stamps.<sup>8</sup>

### 2017 Tuna Fishing



Image source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

<sup>8</sup> Source: Le Monde: [https://www.lemonde.fr/mondephilatelique/article/2020/08/22/nadia-charles-un-timbre-reussi-est-un-timbre-qui-porte-au-reve\\_6049617\\_5470897.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/mondephilatelique/article/2020/08/22/nadia-charles-un-timbre-reussi-est-un-timbre-qui-porte-au-reve_6049617_5470897.html)

I have included this fishing sheetlet just to show that Nadia Charles's illustrative talents extend beyond portraiture of birds. It was also the first sheetlet to include one of Nadia Charles's explanatory notes.

## Conclusion

Nadia Charles has provided us with a small but hopefully growing range of bird stamps which focus on the birdlife in Antarctica. I have personally found the artwork in the stamp (rather than the sheet) difficult to visualise and distinguish, but in a sense, this does chime with what Nadia Charles intends, as she comments in the interview with Le Monde. In reply to the question "What makes a successful stamp?" Her response was:

*"A successful stamp is one which gives to the viewer a subject that holds attention; or which stimulates thoughts and dreams."*

When asked if a stamp has to be "beautiful", she also stated that:

*"A successful stamp is not necessarily beautiful. It can just be striking; but I apply a lot of detail so that the eye lingers over the stamp."*

In both respects, from my standpoint, I would say that Nadia Charles does provide us with illustrations which hold your attention and invites you to analyse the detail. Let's hope that the TAAF postal authority continues to ask her to do more work for their stamp programme.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Kjell Scharning as ever for his website [www.birdtheme.org](http://www.birdtheme.org) for illustrations and information, as well as the websites of: the French Government; national postal operator La Poste; newspaper Le Monde; [www.yvert.com](http://www.yvert.com); Flaklands Conservation; and not least, Nadia Charles herself for her own webpages. I have also taken images from [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com) for which I am additionally grateful. The Yvert & Tellier Catalogue 1 bis (edition 2020) was also invaluable for the technical details.

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<sup>i</sup> The TAAF comprises five distinct administrative districts which make up this Overseas Collectivité. These are: the Crozet Archipelago; the Kerguelen Archipelago (Southern Ocean); the Islands of St Paul and Amsterdam (Indian Ocean); Adélie Land on the Antarctica landmass itself; and (since 2007) the Scattered Islands, comprising Europa, Glorieuses, Juan de Nova, Bassas da India and Tromelin (all in the Indian ocean, around the island of Madagascar).

Source: <https://www.outre-mer.gouv.fr/terres-australes-et-antarctiques-francaises-les-taaf>