

Stamperija Corner – Rare Birds from Djibouti

Introduction

This article is a taster for a series based on recent stamps produced by Stamperija for African and other countries. Some readers may regard these issues as purely aimed at the philatelic market and as such, do not meet their collecting criteria, in that they are unlikely to see usage in the postal system. I may have set out with that mindset but have since become a bit of a fan of these issues.

We look at a set (five stamps) from Djibouti issued by Stamperija in 2017. Back then, you probably would not have been able to buy these stamps in a local post office in Djibouti. That said, these five stamps are official issues authorised by the postal administration in Djibouti. In my view, the set constitutes a valid stamp issue from that country.

Today, postal authorities and philatelic bureaux issue stamps for various reasons. Royal Mail is apparently focused on generating income from its commemorative stamps. Latterly, we have seen British stamps featuring Star Trek, US-based comics, and home-grown pop idols. Across in Belgium, try buying a special issue stamp or sheetlet in a local post office, as I have done; as in Britain, it is hard to do. Go on www.stampworld.com and search “diplomatic relations.” See which countries come up most often: it is hard not to conclude that some jurisdictions issue stamps as much for the “soft power” of politics and international relations as for postal usage.

The countries represented by Stamperija are economically, some of the least developed in the world. If the postal administrations of these countries earn a little income from their contractual arrangements with Stamperija, that seems reasonable to me. I would rather spend my money on these stamps than commemoratives from Royal Mail, but it is all a matter of consumer choice; and awareness of why postal authorities pursue the issuing policies that they do.

Rare Birds from Djibouti

Context

Stamperija is of course, not the only philatelic agent worldwide, but I have looked at their issues because Flight has not listed the bird stamps from the Stamperija countries since 2017. At the same time, Kjell Scharning on his website www.birdtheme.org has also restricted his listing of Stamperija stamps, probably because it is hard to keep up with the new issues. Against this background, I did wonder whether we might be missing some new and interesting bird stamps.

Rare Birds from Djibouti: Why look at this set? Because as we shall see below, it does offer some intriguing birds which (at the date of issue) had not previously featured on stamps. Why begin with a 2017 issue? Because this was the departure point when we stopped looking closely at the Stamperija issues.

The Rare Birds of Djibouti set comprises two sheetlets: one with one stamp; and the second, illustrating four birds. Stamperija issued the sheetlets to support the 2018 Birdpex (Bird Stamp Exhibition) which took place in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (Mondorf-les-Bains) in May 2018.

Sheetlet One: the Black-throated Barbet

The opening sheetlet features one stamp: the Black-throated Barbet (*Tricholaema melanocephala*), from the African Barbet family (Lybiidae). This was (and still is) the first appearance of this bird on a stamp. The African Barbet family comprises 53 species, of which 23 appear on bird stamps.¹

Here is the sheetlet with the Black-throated Barbet stamp:

Djibouti – Djibouti's Rare Birds – Black-throated Barbet (28 July 2017)

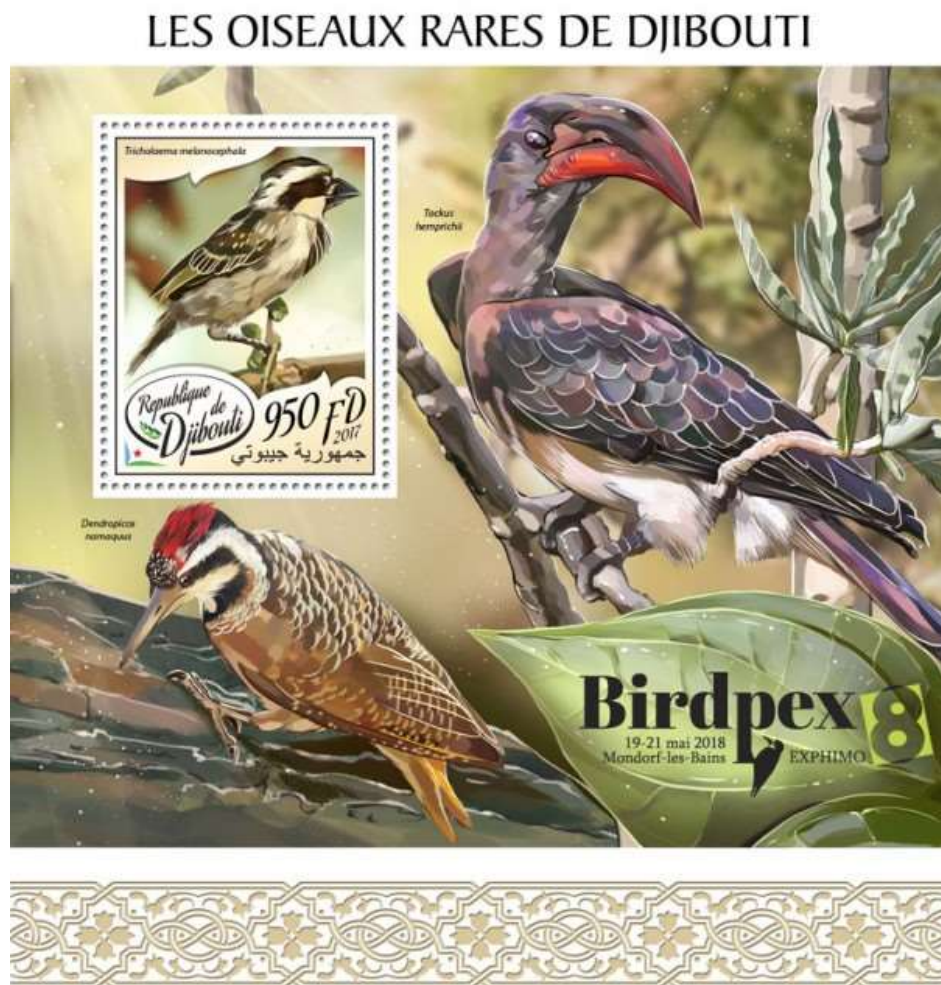


Image source: <https://www.stamperija.eu/product/rare-birds-9>

Unfortunately, as with many Stamperija issues, the birds illustrated on the single stamp sheetlets are often crowded out by the artwork around the stamp. In this instance, the Black-throated Barbet is in

¹ Source: Birdlife Data Zone and www.birdtheme.org

competition with Hemprich's Hornbill (*Lophoceros hemprichii*)² and the Bearded Woodpecker (*Dendropicos namaquus*), more of which below.

The IUCN Red List tells us that the Black-throated Barbet is resident in East Africa, from Eritrea in the North down through Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya. The IUCN Red List classifies this Barbet as being of "Least Concern." The IUCN also indicates that the population is stable, even though unquantified.

Here is the stamp divested of the sheetlet. It looks splendid and as another "first" is a great addition to my collection:



Sheetlet Two: Four Rare Birds

The second sheetlet includes four birds which, at the time of issue, had not previously appeared on any bird stamps. I will show each stamp individually, because the first thing I do when I receive a consignment from Stamperija is to commit an act of vandalism: I remove the stamps from their sheetlets.

First up (top-left) from the block of four is the Bearded Woodpecker (*Dendropicos namaquus*) from the Woodpecker family (Picidae):

² The Sheetlet refers to the *Tockus hemprichi*. However, both the IUCN Red List and eBird use the Latin name *Lophoceros hemprichii* which is what I have used in the text.



The Woodpecker family comprises 254 species, of which there are 97 on stamps.³ At the date of issue, this Stamperija stamp from Djibouti was the first time that the Bearded Woodpecker had appeared on a stamp.⁴

The IUCN Red List shows that the Bearded Woodpecker is classified as being of “Least Concern.” It is also a bird that is present in Eastern Africa (south of Sudan) and in Southern Africa. Bothe Birds of the World and the IUCN red List indicate that the population distribution in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea is patchy, so it is reasonable to conclude that the Bearded Woodpecker would be a rare sighting in Djibouti, though not impossible.

The second stamp (top-right) displays the Black-billed Woodhoopoe (*Phoeniculus somaliensis*) from the Woodhoopoe family (Phoeniculidae). There are just eight birds in the Woodhoopoe family, six of which are available on stamps.⁵ This does not include the Black-billed Woodhoopoe from Djibouti, illustrated below:



³ Source: Birdlife Data Zone and www.birdtheme.org

⁴ The Bearded Woodpecker has since appeared on issues from Namibia and South Africa, both in 2020. Source: www.birdtheme.org

⁵ Source: Birdlife Data Zone and www.birdtheme.org

Despite the English name of this bird, photographs on Birds of the World indicate that the bill may include a hint of orange-red colouring, as captured in the stamp above – the bill is not always solid black as suggested by the name.

The IUCN Red List indicates that the Black-billed Woodhoopoe is resident in Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti. But it would be a rare sighting, as is the theme of this issue.

The IUCN red List classifies the Black-billed Woodhoopoe as “Least Concern.”

Next is the Star-spotted Nightjar (*Caprimulgus stellatus*) the stamp from the bottom-left of the block, from the Nightjar family (Caprimulgidae). Once again, we have here a first-time appearance of the Star-spotted Nightjar on a stamp.

The IUCN Red List classifies the Star-spotted Nightjar as of “Least Concern.” It is resident in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya and Somalia, as well as Djibouti.⁶ Here is the individual stamp:



For this series, I have already reviewed elsewhere other stamps from Stamperija that showcase Nightjars.⁷ Having seen other Stamperija stamps illustrating Nightjars, I recognise that this particular Djibouti stamp is not wholly convincing. On photographs that I have seen on Birds of the World, the Star-spotted Nightjar is more a dull grey-brown, rather than the red-brown depicted in the artwork of the stamp.

I acknowledge that Nightjars may be challenging birds to illustrate accurately in small format. This is because for many species, their plumage has naturally evolved to provide the perfect camouflage in their habitats. Depicting the detail and subtle shades of that camouflage in the feathers cannot be easy to do precisely for any individual bird or stamp. In this instance, we must assume that the stamp designer intended to show a Star-spotted Nightjar.

The fourth and final stamp (bottom-right) shows the D’Arnaud’s Barbet (*Trachyphonus darnaudii*), once again from the African Barbets family (Lybiidae). This is also the first-time appearance of this bird on a stamp.

⁶ Source: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/stsnig1/cur/introduction>

⁷ To be covered in Stamperija Corner 1A (Part A) and 1B (Part B).

The D'Arnaud's Barbet is principally resident in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. It might conceivably be present in Djibouti and as such constitute a "rare bird" of Djibouti. It does have "Least Concern" status. Here is the stamp:



Having inspected each individual stamp, we now bring them all back together in the original sheetlet:

Djibouti – Rare Birds of Djibouti (28 July 2017)



Image source: <https://stampera.eu/product/rare-birds-8>

Conclusion

The stamps from Stamperija may not be for everyone, but through this “taster” article and subsequent episodes, I have found a few gems. That is, birds that have previously not featured on stamps; or birds which are relatively rare on stamp issues. It is always quite a find to see a new bird depicted on a stamp and I think that Stamperija has done some good work in broadening the variety of birds on stamps. For that reason, I will continue to look out for their new issues.

My Note

I write about the bird stamps in my collection. For this new series, I am seeking neither to encourage nor to dissuade readers from acquiring the featured stamps. My own relationship with Stamperija is simply as an ordinary customer.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Stamperija who permit download of stamp images that I have used in this article. Individual stamps are from my own collection. Thanks too, also to the IUCN Red List, eBird, Birds of the World and www.birdtheme.org for background information.