

CANADA'S NATURAL HISTORY IN PHILATELY

Naturalist may prefer to conduct their studies in the field but for a small group of philatelists (stamp collectors), an interest in natural history can be followed through their favourite hobby. Canada usually issues stamps to commemorate people and events, but a considerable number of postage stamps are issued to promote conservation or wildlife themes.

The first postage stamp issued in 1851 by Canada featured a beaver, and while we had to wait close to 100 years for the second wildlife stamp, many have been issued since the second world war era. The modern era began with a stamp showing another of Canada's symbols, the Canada goose. It was featured on a 7 cent airmail stamp in 1948, again in 1952 on a regular 7 cent stamp and finally in 1963 on a 15 cent stamp.

The 1952 Canada goose stamp was issued to celebrate National Wildlife Week. For the next five years, until 1957, Canada's wildlife was portrayed on one or more stamps. The 1953 stamps featured the polar bear, moose, and big horn sheep. These were in denominations of 2,3, and 4 cents when the regular postage per first class was 4 cents. The following year walrus, bear and gannets were shown and in 1955 the musk ox and whooping crane. The whooping crane stamp was particularly attractive being done in light blue and showing two cranes flying over a Northern Canada swamp. The last Wildlife Week stamp was of a loon issued in 1957.

Ten years later Canada Post began to issue multi-colored stamps rather than using drawings of each particular bird or animal. Four bird stamps were issued in 1968 to 1969 which featured gray jay, white throated sparrow, Ipswich

sparrow, and hermit thrush. The gray jay stamp caused some controversy among naturalists since many felt it to be a variant of the Oregon jay and hence more of an American bird than Canadian. Between these issues and today's stamps, most stamps concerned with natural history featured plants, some showing provincial flowers, others showing maples in the various seasons but animals were represented by the narwhale, polar bear and mountain sheep.

Stamps publicizing endangered wildlife in Canada have been issued each year since 1977. Cougar, peregrin falcon, spiny soft-shelled turtle, bowhead whale, Atlantic white fish, and prairie chicken have been featured and it is planned to issue two such stamps each year for sometime into the future.

Distribution and migratory patterns of birds make it difficult to call many locally occurring birds Canadian. As a result Newfoundland, St. Pierre et Miquelon, Greenland, Iceland, Russia, and many Central American and Caribbean countries have issued stamps illustrating local birds. Also the U.S. has issued many wildlife conservation stamps, one of which in 1978 showed the Island's avian emblem, the blue jay. A yellow shafted flicker and a yellow warbler were recently on stamps from the Canary Islands. St. Vincent stamps have shown barn owls while other owls such as great grey, saw-whet, barred, and great horned owls have been on U.S. stamps.

Bird watching and stamp collecting are two of the most popular hobbies we have and they can be successfully combined, especially on a cold winter's day.

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