

FALCONRY ON STAMPS

by M. Alan Jenkins



Set of seven United Arab Emirates, 2009

I became interested in falconry in 1959 when it wasn't widely practiced in the U.S., and there was no Internet to easily obtain information on the sport; contact with other falconers was non-existent for years. My best source for falconry information came from the repeated reading and even hand-copying-typing-of an article in the Encyclopedia Britannica at my high school library. Because of the difficulty in finding falconry information, whenever I came across anything remotely falconry or raptor related, such as a 1960s advertisement for a winter coat showing a man holding a taxidermy-mounted "falcon" on his fist, I collected/bought it.

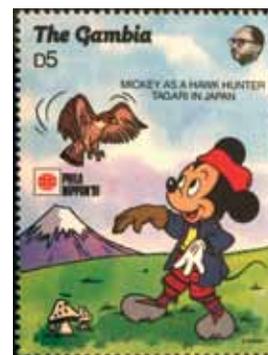
This explains why I still own an un-sellable book about vultures. When John Swift gave out annual NAFA Field Meet pins at meets he hosted, I kept all of mine and later catalogued them as a collection. That expanded to include the California Hawking Club's and other clubs' falconry pins, decals and patches. Collecting became sublimation for raging falconry hormones during times when I couldn't "practice" it, and was the beginning of my collecting hobbies.

I became interested in collecting postage stamps when I used some dance stamps to enliven a membership list booklet for the Tulsa folk dance group for which I am the treasurer. My collecting tastes run to small, colorful and beautiful objects, in part because it's easier to collect and hoard images of zeppelins than actual zeppelins!

I define stamps having an image of a raptor with falconry equipment such as jesses, bells, or a hood,

or perched on a fist as falconry stamps, but the definition is flexible. For example, the stamp of Mickey Mouse as a "hawk hunter" is considered a falconry stamp because

hunting is part of the theme, but stamps of Harry Potter with a jessed Snowy Owl are not. Stamps of raptors used in falconry, but without any attached falconry equipment, are considered as part of my ancillary falconry stamp collection, as are stamps of falconry dogs, falconry quarry and falconers depicted on stamps. I only attempt to collect some examples of ancillary stamps as there are many, birds being a very popular collecting theme. Some stamps carry photographs of obviously captive raptors, but if the bird is not equipped with falconry furniture I don't consider it as a falconry stamp. These might be included in the ancillary collection, however.



Gambia, Sc-1094, 1991

For this article a postage stamp is considered unique if it has a different denomination, image, year, color or other important feature; each will have its own catalogue number. I've bent my own rules to include



a revenue stamp (in contrast to postage stamps) with a falconry image; it's rare, being the only such stamp I know
Isle of Man, Great Britain, Undated revenue stamp

of, and its composition and design are esthetically pleasing. There are also semi-postal stamps (part postage and part charitable contribution) and poster stamps and other non-governmental stamps which philatelists somewhat pejoratively term as labels or Cinderellas.

There is a class of modern stamps whereby anyone can create stamps, using an image of his or her choice, with a potentially infinite number of choices. These are valid for use with the U.S. and Canadian mail. I call them commissioned postage stamps. They are printed by entities such as Zazzle.com, Stamps.com and the Canada Post. For my collection, I include these as postage stamps because, for my tastes the falconry image is paramount, not the stamp's origin. Commissioned stamps are often of lesser quality than government produced postage stamps. Peter Devers has generously supplied me with some commissioned



Commissioned stamp of British falconer Paul Beecroft, from Peter Devers



stamps he had made, others I bought. If you, Dear Reader, create any commissioned falconry stamps, I would beg for the opportunity to purchase one for the Archives of Falconry collections. You would become a part of a world class falconry history museum without having to be mounted and stuffed.

My collecting has been made easier by the previous published work of other collectors such as Tom Gossard, whose three articles are cited below. His articles deal more with stamps having raptor images rather than a falconry theme. There are several stamps I would not have been aware of, had it not been for Tom's early scholarship. His last article, in the 1999 CHC Journal, became outdated when new stamps were published (as will this article); and I discovered some earlier falconry stamps he apparently wasn't aware of. The article by J. A. Van der Ven was well packed with falconry stamp images new to me that sent me to the Internet to locate and purchase.

Peter B. Devers informed me of many wonderful falconry stamps, some very obscure that I wasn't aware of, and gave me examples of some, such as the commissioned Zazzle.com stamps. Knowing of these falconry stamps makes finding and purchasing them much easier, so I'm personally grateful to him; my credit card balance, less so.

Modern postage stamps began in 1940 in Britain. Today there are an estimated half a million or more of them worldwide. Finding new falconry stamps feels much like a treasure hunt – lots of searching with few, but big, rewards. The stamp catalogue I use, as do most Americans, is the Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue contained in six hefty volumes. There are European catalogues, such as Michel and Stanley Gibbons, which are better than Scott, because the commissioned stamps are the only American falconry stamps that I know of and these are not listed in Scott. My Scott catalogue edition is 2005, out of date but, as a library de-accessioned set, the price was right.



Qatar, Sc-935, 2000



Great Britain, Sc-1797, The Queen's Beasts, 1998

In the catalogues stamps are mainly listed in "sets," which have a common theme. Finding them involves frequent tedious searches for "singles," mostly of online sales and dealers' listings. Some falconry stamps occur within sets. "Falconry" is too narrow and unusual a topic for a search term, so one has to use broader terms such as "bird," which is a popular stamp category that will return thousands of hits that have to be checked visually, or a tedious perusal through the six volumes of Scott. Some database/search engines allow narrower search terms, such as "falcon." Seemingly non-related search topics such as tennis, art, heraldry, dogs, castles and names of painters, such as Vernet, Holbein, Hiroshige or Rembrandt will sometimes reveal a falconry stamp. Some images of falconry are too small to easily see. I almost missed the falcon perched on the left hand of the horseman in the foreground of what was probably a scene of dogs hunting stags.

(Czechoslovakia, Sc-1991, 1975, p. 10). If you can't see, take my word that it's there, no need to schedule an eye exam. Yet, be aware that cataloguers and stamp designers don't always know a "hawk from a handsaw." One Dutch stamp shows the image of what appears to be a statue of a falconer casting off a falcon, but close examination and an Internet search inform me that the bird is a blue-footed booby, the subject of a poem.

There are an estimated 500,000-plus postage stamps worldwide to date. Some falconry stamps show up within the themes of fine art stamps, heraldry, insignia, or incidental motifs on stamps of other topics such as dogs, art, castles and ceramics. Falconry stamps have been printed by countries where it's unlikely the sport was ever practiced, such as Paraguay, Gambia and the Philippines. As stated, most philatelists are not falconers and many errors are made. One set of eight Umm al Qiwain (UAE) stamps for sale was stated as picturing eagles when the species were falcons, including a Saker (with hard-to-see bells and therefore a falconry stamp) and buteos. One stamp pairs a sheik with a culturally inappropriate goshawk, and the subject of that stamp is the celebration of a new bride.

With the help of others I have identified about 150 falconry stamps at this time, but I hope that dogged search will flush out more (pun intended). It's my goal to have a complete collection for the Archives and to post them online.

As well as Peter Devers and Tom Gossard, I thank my favorite editor and literary agent, my wife Sally, for help on this article and for her many trips to the post office to pick up many exotic registered letters. Jon D'Arpino encouraged my writing and was helpful in its preparation. As a former NAFA officer myself, I know he works harder than you can know

The photos, unless otherwise attributed, and all the errors are mine. Ultimately I will will (another pun, but I'm done with them) my falconry stamps to the Archives of American Falconry, although there's no rush on the delivery date!

The final Archive stamp collection will include some I haven't included in here, stamps which have been previously published and ancillary stamps mentioned above (of falconry dogs, falconers, and quarry). I also will donate my falconry "insignia" collection of worldwide falconry club and field meet patches, pins and decals to the Archives; and those will be the subjects of a future article. I recently retired from my wildlife biology career, and I should have the time to create a website where all these treasures can be seen online; or, much, much later, be seen in person at the Archives of Falconry, Boise, Idaho.

My contact data are listed in the online NAFA Membership Directory. If you wish to communicate about or swap falconry stamps, please contact me; and watch for an announcement of my falconry stamp website.

References

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- Gossard, Tom. 1998. *Birds of Prey in the World of Postage Stamps*. *North American Falconers' Association Journal*, 37:25-27.
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- Van der Ven, J. A. 1988. *Valkerij en filatelie*. Pages 99-103, in *50 Jaar Valkerij "Adriaan Mollen," 1938-1988*, 164 pp. *Nederlands Valkeniersverbond Adriaan Mollen*, Amersfoort, Netherlands.

Page 9 images (left to right, top to bottom): Abu Dhabi, Sc-35, wild Saker and Sheik Zaid bin Sultan al Nahayan, author and falconer; Belarus, 2008 on first day cover; Greenland, Sc-361, 2000; Czech Republic, Sc-3131, 2000; Gambia, Sc-2308g, 2000; USSR, Sc-6492, 1999; Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 1964; France, Sc-1115, 1965; Great Britain (Jersey), Sc-435, 1987; Kazakhstan, Sc-166, 1996; Portugal, Sc-2008-2011, 1994; Dubai, Sc-80, 82, 84 and 85, 1967; Dubai, Sc-C2, C4, C6, and C8, 1963, Air Mail; USA commissioned stamps.

Page 10 images (left to right, top to bottom): Portugal, Sc-2012, 1994; Germany, Sc-1835, 1994, Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II; Czechoslovakia, Sc-1991, 1975; Czechoslovakia, Sc-1181, 1963; Kyrgyzstan, Sc-63, 1995; Luxembourg, Sc-B273, 1969; United Arab Emirates, Sc-307, definitive stamps series, Sc-297-313; United Arab Emirates, 2010; United Arab Emirates, Sc-85 and 86, 1976; Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 1964; Qatar, Sc-839a, souvenir sheet.

