

Philately of the World Congress of Herpetology

Postage stamps serve as prepaid fees for transmission of letters and parcels, as means of disseminating information and advertisements, and as objects for hobbyists, postal historians, and as investments. Other items covered under philately include postcards, envelopes, aerogrammes, information sheets, and folders, some of which are privately (that is, not produced and sold by the official national postal agencies) issued. In this article, we review postal products associated with the World Congress of Herpetology (1989–2020).

No philatelic products were released in conjunction with the First World Congress of Herpetology, held in Canterbury, United Kingdom (11–19 September 1989), and there is no evidence of any special slogans or postmarks issued by local post offices. This was surprising for a country that “invented” the postage stamp and has a rich and well-documented philatelic history.

The first philatelic commemorative items were produced

for the Second Congress, held in Adelaide, Australia (29 December 1993 to 6 January 1994), and comprised two cachets (or special cancellations) and an official cancellation dated 29 December 1993 issued by the Philatelic Sales Centre, Adelaide. The images depicted on the pictorial cancellations comprise a *Litoria caerulea* (Fig. 1A) and several unrecognizable squamates, presumably inspired by Aboriginal art (Fig. 1B). The covers were produced by Australia Post (as indicated on the reverse), both bearing a montage of recent Australian stamps on the left, an A\$1 postage stamp from 1993 (“Ginger Riley,” showing Aboriginal artwork comprising a bird flanked by two snakes; the British stamp catalog of Stanley Gibbons, catalog number SG 1419) on the right bearing the postal cancellation, with the pictorial cancellation on the middle of the upper edge of each cover. Two official postcards were also produced (Fig. 2).

The fourth meeting of the Congress, held at Bentota, near Colombo, Sri Lanka (3–9 December 2001) was the first, and until now, the only Congress to have commemorative stamps issued for the event. The release included a set of four stamps (Fig. 3A–B; SG 1562–1565), a miniature/souvenir sheet (Fig. 3C; SG MS 1566), a first-day cover for the former, and with a

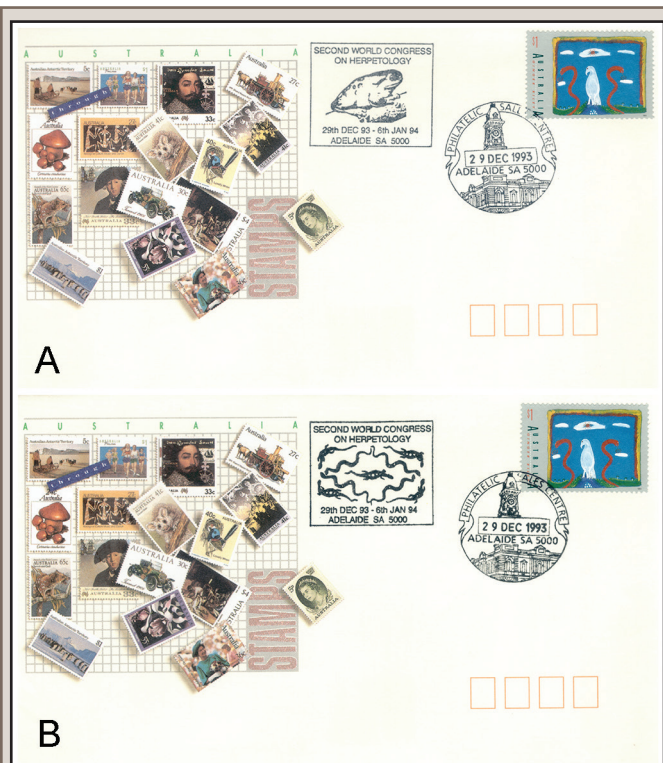


FIG. 1. Two covers bearing a special cancellation, dated 29 December 1993, issued by the Philatelic Sales Centre, Adelaide, to commemorate the Second World Congress of Herpetology. A) Special cancellation showing *Litoria caerulea*; B) Special cancellation showing several unrecognizable squamates.

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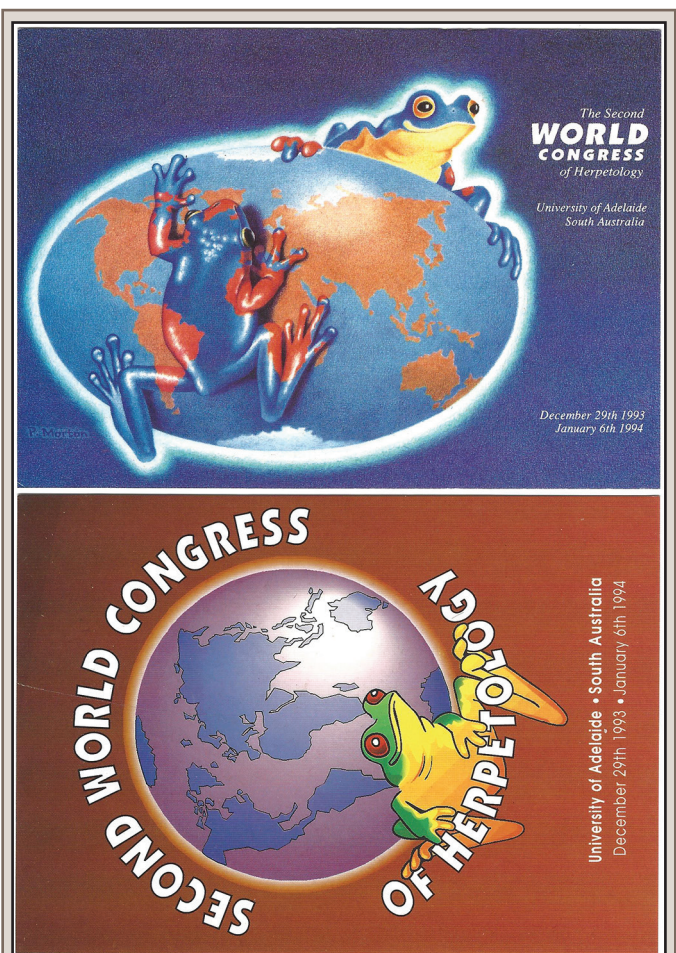


FIG. 2. Official postcards from the Second World Congress of Herpetology, held in Adelaide, Australia.

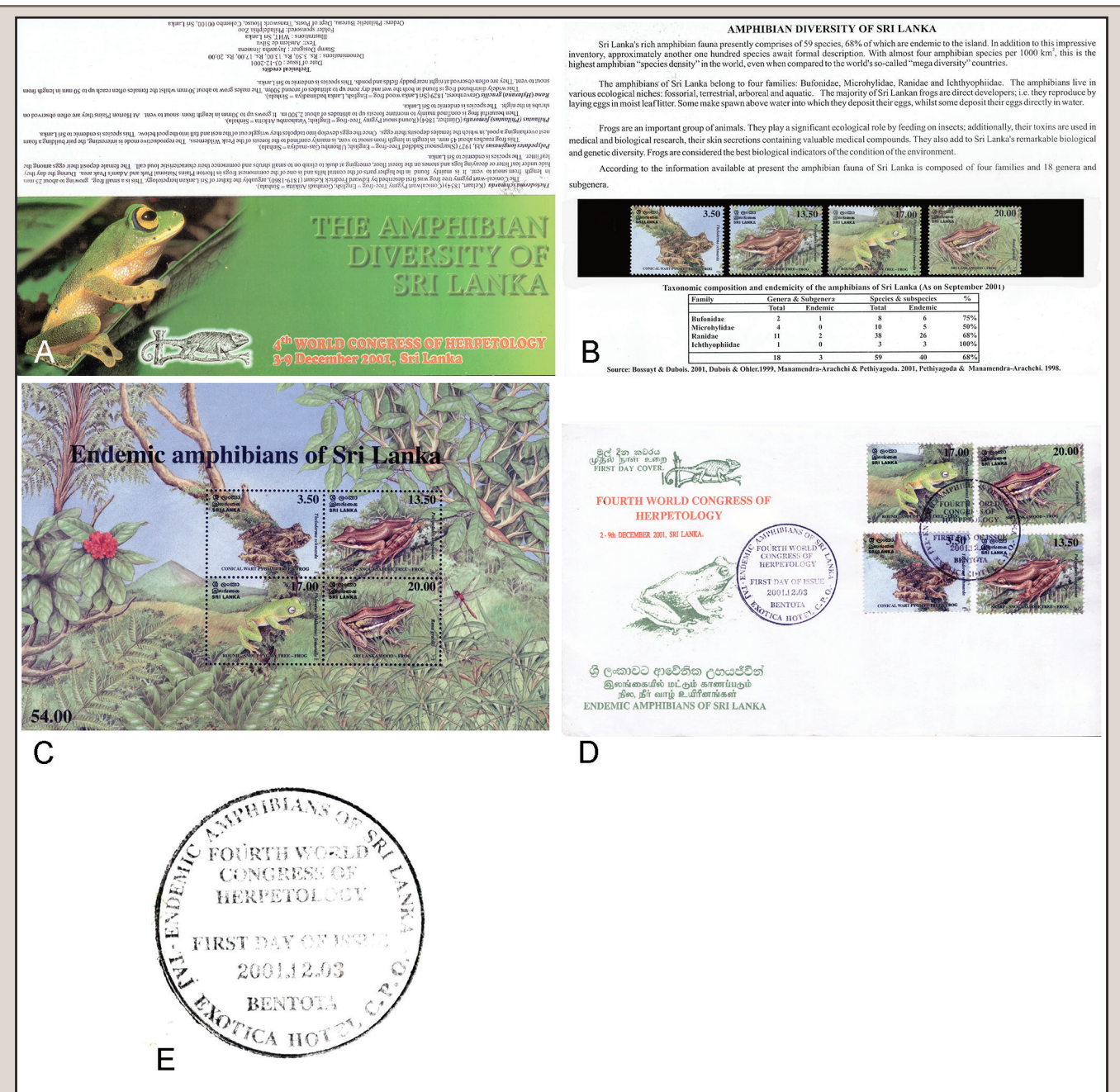


FIG. 3. Postal products issued by Sri Lanka Post on 3 December 2001 to commemorate the Fourth World Congress of Herpetology. A) Set of four stamps in a presentation pack (front and back covers); B) the same, showing contents; C) miniature sheet; D) first-day cover; E) special cancellation.

special cancellation (Fig. 3D). Species depicted (using current nomenclature) included *Pseudophilautus schmarda* (Sri Lankan Rupee, රු 3.50), *Taruga longinasus* (රු 13.50), *Pseudophilautus femoralis* (රු 17.00), and *Hydrophylax gracilis* (රු 20.00). The souvenir sheet (SG MS1566) was a combination of the above four designs within an illustrated selva (or the non-denominated area of a philatelic sheet). For the release, Sri Lanka Post worked with the leading Sri Lankan herpetologist, Ansem de Silva, who was also the Conference Director, on the design of the stamps and their distribution to the Congress delegates. Sources of the images were from de Silva himself, who provided living frogs to the artist and also took him on field trips (A. de Silva, pers. comm.). Additional images were obtained from the Wildlife

Heritage Trust, a local nature conservation NGO and publisher of fine natural history books. de Silva also prepared the text for the presentation pack, which provided short descriptions of the species featured. The stamps were designed by Jayantha Jinasena, who subsequently prepared illustrations for the folio volume on the country's snakes (de Silva, 2008) that was the source of a philatelic forgery (see Das et al. 2016). Also issued at the Congress was a postcard showing *Ceratophora aspera*, *Trimeresurus trigonocephalus*, *Crocodylus palustris*, *Geochelone elegans*, and *Pseudophilautus hoipolloi* (Fig. 4), designed by the Wildlife Heritage Trust.

A printed postcard was produced to promote the Sixth World Congress of Herpetology, held in the Amazonian city of Manaus,

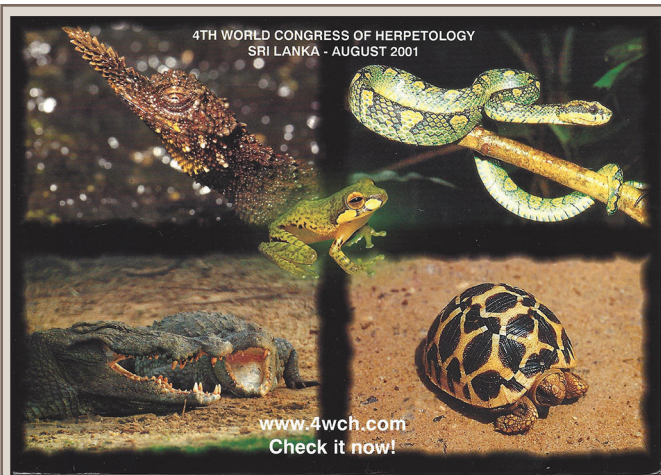


FIG. 4. Official postcard from the Fourth World Congress of Herpetology, Sri Lanka.

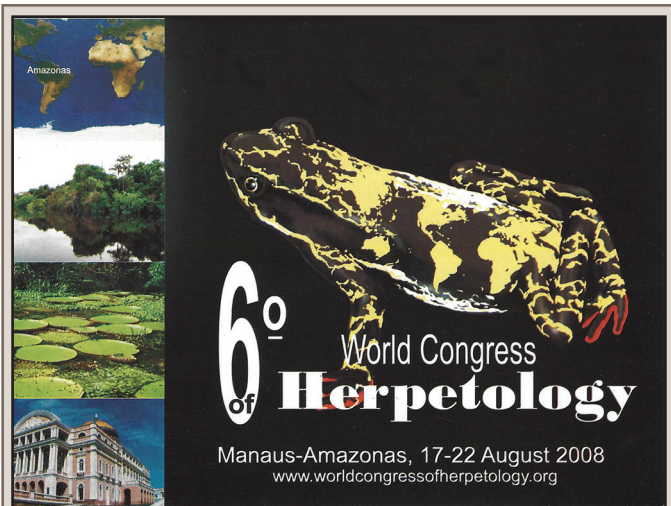


FIG. 5. Official postcard from the Sixth World Congress of Herpetology, Brazil.



FIG. 6. Printed postcards from a booklet issued to commemorate the Eighth World Congress of Herpetology by the Kunming Institute of Zoology, the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

in Brazil. It depicts a morphed image of a species of *Atelopus hoogmoedi* (superimposed on a map of the world), besides images of landscapes and landmarks of the city (Fig. 5).

Printed picture postcards were issued by the Kunming Institute of Zoology, a part of the Chinese Academy of Sciences for the Eighth World Congress, which was shifted from the city of Hangzhou to the town of Tonglu in the People's Republic of China (15–21 August 2016). The nine designs (excluding the title page, which was also printed in postcard format) show Chinese amphibians and reptiles, including *Rana kukunoris*, *Gloydius strauchii*, *Diploderma vela*, *Elaphe carinata*, *Scutiger boulengeri*,

Bufo gargarizans, *Batrachuperus karlschmidti*, *Diploderma iadinum*, and *Nanorana parkeri*. They were issued in a booklet format entitled “Amphibians and Reptiles of Upper Mekong River” (Fig. 6) that was dedicated “To the 8th World Congress of Herpetology in China.” The photographs are credited to Kai Wang, currently a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma and an associate of the Kunming Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The most recent Congress was the ninth, held in Dunedin, New Zealand (5–10 January 2020). A maximum card (comprising a printed postcard with a matching stamp affixed on obverse, ide-



FIG. 7. A maximum card privately prepared during the Ninth World Congress of Herpetology, showing a 1991 issue from New Zealand, depicting *Sphenodon punctatus*.



FIG. 8. Herpetological stamp-affixed Ninth World Congress of Herpetology promotional flyer, featuring New Zealand stamps from 1984, entitled "Amphibians and Reptiles."

ally with a date-marked with a postal cancellation that commemorates an event) was prepared for private distribution, with an image of a 5-cent coin (Standard Catalog of World Coins, Krause and Mishler, KM#34) showing *Sphenodon punctatus*, issued in 1967 and phased out in 2006. On the obverse of the card, the text surrounding the image of the coin lists venues and dates of all the Congresses. It also had one image from a set of four stamps (SG 1590–1593), all of 40 cents face value, issued 17 April 1991 under the World Wide Fund for Nature's stamps series, entitled "Tuatara" (Fig. 7).

A herpetological stamp-affixed Ninth World Congress of Herpetology promotional flyer (printed on cardboard material) was also prepared (Fig. 8), featuring five stamps from a 11 July 1984 release ("Amphibians and Reptiles"), showing *Leiopelma hamiltoni* (NZ \$0.24), *Oligosoma homalonotum* (NZ \$0.24), *Hoplodactylus rakiurae* (NZ\$ 0.30), *Oligosoma otagense* (NZ\$ 0.58), and *Hoplodactylus chrysosireticus* (NZ \$0.70). Cancellations were made during the Congress at the Dunedin North Post Office next to the Congress venue, located within the Otago University Bookshop.

A set of private maxicards was produced by one of us (ID) during the Ninth World Congress of Herpetology in Dunedin (Fig. 9 shows representatives). "Box of Frogs" postcards that were being

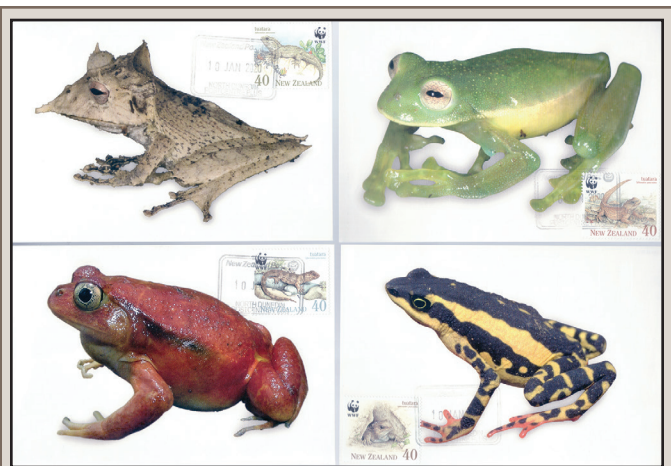


FIG. 9. Selected private maximum cards produced during the Ninth World Congress of Herpetology in Dunedin, from "Box of Frogs" postcards reprinted from *The Book of Frogs. A Life-Size Guide to Six Hundred Species from Around the World*.

sold at the bookshop at the time were used to prepare the maxicards. These were reprinted by the publisher (Ivy Press) from their book, *The Book of Frogs. A Life-Size Guide to Six Hundred Species from Around the World* (Halliday 2015). Being commercially available make these items eligible for philatelic usage, such as exhibitions and competitions.

This communication brings together information on philatelic issues related to the World Congress of Herpetology. Only during the Fourth World Congress in Sri Lanka were commemorative stamps released. At four other occasions, commemorative cancellations, postcards or private maximum cards were produced. In the past, postage stamps have been frequently associated with promotion and publicity of a variety of activities and public causes. In the present context, philatelic releases have the potential to promote the science of herpetology to a wider audience, serve as an attractive (and portable) souvenir for the event, and provide a collectible for use in future exhibitions, either philatelic or on the history of the Congress.

Acknowledgments.—We thank past Congress Directors for devoting years to organizing their respective event. Ansem de Silva and Rohan Pethiyagoda provided information on the Sri Lankan commemorative and postcard, and Célio Fernando Baptista Haddad identified the frog on the Brazilian postcard. Don White of Dunedin Stamp Centre provided plenty of 'herp' stamps for use in preparing the special issues as well as working space, and Donny Tan and Reuben Sharma for ...well..., at least tolerating the philatelic pursuits described. We are indebted to Kraig Adler, Aaron Bauer, and Genevieve Gee for reading an earlier draft of this article.

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