

Herpetological postage stamps issued from the Philippines

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Abstract

In this essay, we commemorate the zoological and herpetological contributions of Angel Chua Alcala, with a review of stamps and pictorial cancellations on herpetological themes from the Philippines. Between 1982 and 2017, a total of 79 such stamps, stamp sheetlets and undenominated tabs, depicting amphibians and reptiles have been officially issued by the postal administration of the country, all but one within its commemorative stamp releases. Species featured are those of ecotourism importance, in addition to threatened or endemic taxa, although stylized as well as non-local species too have featured on stamps produced by the country.

Keywords: Philippines, philately, stamps, postmarks, amphibians, reptiles

Introduction

The archipelagic nation of the Philippines has, over the years, issued more than its fair share of stamps on herpetological themes. Understandably, a majority of these depict marine turtles, much associated both with the country's culture and heritage and linked to ecotourism and its beaches and marine life. Herpetological motifs that have appeared include snakes, linked to the annual celebration of the Chinese Lunar New Year (the snake taking the sixth spot once in twelve years).

This essay, honoring one of Philippines' distinguished environmental heroes, Dr. Angel Chua Alcala, presents an inventory of postage stamps issued by the Philippines Post. Herpetologists have acknowledged Dr Alcala's significant work on the country's herpetofauna by naming a genus of amphibian, *Alcalus*, in his honor (Brown et al., 2015).

Depiction of amphibians and reptiles on stamps of the world is widespread and has been discussed in the philatelic literature (e.g., Riemer, 1993; Das, 1994, 2014; Watermolen, 1995), and specialist catalogs exist on the topic, such as those of Eichler (2017) for amphibians and Bearse et al. (1977) and

Domfil (1992) for the herpetofauna as a whole. Published literature in herpetological philately includes regional inventories: Amr (2013) for the Middle East, and Das (2014) for Malaysia; and the use of the theme for raising conservation awareness, chiefly, marine turtles (Balazs et al., 1990; Gomez and Balazs 1983), drawing attention to other topics, such as cultural significance of herpetofaunas (Rings 2005), or understanding local perceptions of a nation's biodiversity through its philatelic releases (Nemésio et al., 2013).

All official issues from the Philippines, featuring amphibians and reptiles, were enumerated (Table 1). The cut-off date was 22 June 2020. We include here stamps that feature herpetological motifs, symbols or represent stylized species that sometimes are unrecognizable to species. Names of series follow Stanley Gibbons catalogues. Abbreviations of catalogue prefix, SG represent the Stanley Gibbons Catalog numbers (from the SG catalogues). Text figures are not reproduced to scale

Results

Philatelic issues from the Philippines started in the year 1854, during Spanish dominion under Queen Isabella II, and with "Filipinas" since 1872 from the reign of King Amadeus I, via the use of overprinted United States stamps in 1899, to the first stamps under its current name in 1946, upon the country's independence on 4 July. A postal history of the Philippines is in Encarnacion (1985). At the time of this review (22 June 2020), as many as 79 postage stamps (including stamp sheetlets and undenominated tabs) on a herpetological theme have been issued by the country (Table 1). Face values are indicated in Philippine Pesos (PHP), except for the first herpetological issue, a low-value of 40 centavos.

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Table 1. Herpetological stamps issued by the Philippines. Codes on the importance of the herpetological image include (a) primary, when the image is central to the theme, such as of direct relevance to the title of the series; (b) secondary, when the image is indirectly related to the issue; (c) herpetological motifs, symbols or stylized images unrecognizable to species. Other abbreviations include: SG, Stanley Gibbons catalog number; p, Philippine Peso.

SI	SG	Series Name	Face value	Code	Date of issue	Species depicted
1	1707	10 th Anniversary of United Nations Environmental Programme	p0.40	b	5 October 1982	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
2	2091 perforate	Olympic Games, Seoul (1 st Issue)	p1	b	11 July 1988	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
3	2091 imperforate	Olympic Games, Seoul (1 st Issue)	p1	b	11 July 1988	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
4	2762	ASEAN Environment Year 1995	p2	a	10 August 1995	Indeterminate sea turtle
5	MS2764	ASEAN Environment Year 1995	p2	a	10 August 1995	Indeterminate sea turtle
6	3021	International Year of the Reef	p16	a	24 October 1997	Indeterminate sea turtle
7	MS3022	International Year of the Reef	p16	a	24 October 1997	Indeterminate sea turtle
8	3166	International Year of the Ocean	p15	a	24 October 1998	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
9	MS3167	International Year of the Ocean	p15	a	24 October 1998	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
10	3234	Frogs	p5	a	5 April 1999	<i>Rhacophorus pardalis</i>
11	3235	Frogs	p5	a	5 April 1999	<i>Platymantis dorsalis</i>
12	3236	Frogs	p5	a	5 April 1999	<i>Limnonectes woodworthi</i>
13	3237	Frogs	p5	a	5 April 1999	<i>Limnonectes magnus</i>
14	MS3238a	Frogs	p5	a	5 April 1999	<i>Nyctixalus spinosus</i>
15	MS3238b	Frogs	p5	a	5 April 1999	<i>Kaloula conjuncta</i>
16	MS3238c	Frogs	p5	a	5 April 1999	<i>Pulchrana granocula</i>
17	3242	Marine Life	p5	a	11 May 1999	<i>Laticauda colubrina</i>
18	3391	New Year. Year of the Snake	p5	a	20 December 2000	<i>Pantherophis guttatus</i>
19	3392	New Year. Year of the Snake	p11	a	20 December 2000	<i>Pantherophis guttatus</i>
20	MS3393a perforate	2001 Year of the Snake	p5	a	20 December 2000	<i>Pantherophis guttatus</i>
21	MS3393b perforate	2001 Year of the Snake	p11	a	20 December 2000	<i>Pantherophis guttatus</i>
22	MS3393a imperforate	2001 Year of the Snake	p5	a	20 December 2000	<i>Pantherophis guttatus</i>
23	MS3393b imperforate	2001 Year of the Snake	p11	a	20 December 2000	<i>Pantherophis guttatus</i>
24	3401	Hong Kong 2001. International Stamp Exhibition. Flora and Fauna	p5	a	3 February 2001	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>
25	MS3403c	Hong Kong 2001. International Stamp Exhibition. Flora and Fauna	p11	a	3 February 2001	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>

Cont'd. Table 1. Herpetological stamps issued by the Philippines.

SI	SG	Series Name	Face value	Code	Date of issue	Species depicted
26	MS3505	Fisheries and Coastal Resources Conservation	p5	a	24 June 2002	Indeterminate sea turtle
27	3692	The Twelve Animals of the Lunar New Year Cycle	p6	a	9 September 2004	<i>Pantherophis guttatus</i>
28	3870	Philippine Marine Turtles	p7	a	31 March 2006	<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i>
29	3871	Philippine Marine Turtles	p7	a	31 March 2006	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>
30	3872	Philippine Marine Turtles	p7	a	31 March 2006	<i>Caretta caretta</i>
31	3873	Philippine Marine Turtles	p7	a	31 March 2006	<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>
32	MS3874	Philippine Marine Turtles	p26	a	31 March 2006	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
33	4308	Philippines Marine Biodiversity	p5	a	18 November 2010	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
34	4458	Philippine Crocodile	p7	a	16 May 2011	<i>Crocodylus mindorensis</i>
35	4459	Philippine Crocodile	p7	a	16 May 2011	<i>Crocodylus mindorensis</i>
36	4460	Philippine Crocodile	p7	a	16 May 2011	<i>Crocodylus mindorensis</i>
37	4461	Philippine Crocodile	p7	a	16 May 2011	<i>Crocodylus mindorensis</i>
38	4495	Philippine Endemic Lizards	p7	a	30 August 2011	<i>Otosaurus cumingi</i>
39	4496	Philippine Endemic Lizards	p7	a	30 August 2011	<i>Gekko carusadensis</i>
40	4497	Philippine Endemic Lizards	p7	a	30 August 2011	<i>Cyrtodactylus mamanwa</i>
41	4498	Philippine Endemic Lizards	p7	a	30 August 2011	<i>Parvoscincus leucospilos</i>
42	MS4499a	Philippine Endemic Lizards	p7	a	30 August 2011	<i>Gonocephalus sophiae</i>
43	MS4499b	Philippine Endemic Lizards	p7	a	30 August 2011	<i>Tropidophorus grayii</i>
44	MS4499c	Philippine Endemic Lizards	p7	a	30 August 2011	<i>Hydrosaurus pustulatus</i>
45	MS4499d	Philippine Endemic Lizards	p7	a	30 August 2011	<i>Brachymeles elerae</i>
46	4538	Endemic Frogs	p7	a	15 December 2011	<i>Nyctixalus spinosus</i>
47	4539	Endemic Frogs	p7	a	15 December 2011	<i>Platymantis pygmaeus</i>
48	4540	Endemic Frogs	p7	a	15 December 2011	<i>Barbourula busuangensis</i>
49	4541	Endemic Frogs	p7	a	15 December 2011	<i>Platymantis biak</i>
50	MS4542a	Endemic Frogs	p7	a	15 December 2011	<i>Rhacophorus pardalis</i>

Cont'd. Table 1. Herpetological stamps issued by the Philippines.

SI	SG	Series Name	Face value	Code	Date of issue	Species depicted
51	MS4542b	Endemic Frogs	p7	a	15 December 2011	<i>Kaloula kalingensis</i>
52	MS4542c	Endemic Frogs	p7	a	15 December 2011	<i>Sanguirana igorata</i>
53	MS4542d	Endemic Frogs	p7	a	15 December 2011	<i>Alcalus mariae</i>
54	4613	Year of the Snake	p10	c	12 December 2012	Indeterminate species of <i>Naja</i>
55	4614	Year of the Snake	p30	c	12 December 2012	Indeterminate species of <i>Naja</i>
56	MS4615	Year of the Snake	p10 (x 2), p30 (x 2)	c	12 December 2012	Indeterminate species of <i>Naja</i> ; <i>Naja naja</i> on selvage to right
57	MS4667	Marine Biodiversity	- (on selvage)	a	2 August 2013	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
58	MS4668	Marine Biodiversity. Thailand 2013 International Stamp Exhibition. Overprinted	- (on selvage)	a	8 August 2013	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
59	4681	50 th Fish Conservation Week	p10	a	14 October 2013	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
60	Awaited	Philippine Wildlife	p15	a	11 November 2015	<i>Hydrosaurus pustulosus</i>
61	Awaited (op of No. 57)	Marine Biodiversity	- (on selvage)	a	28 November 2017; overprint of issue from 2 August 2013	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
62	Awaited	Endemic Lizards II	p12	a	27 March 2017	<i>Gekko gigante</i>
63	Awaited	Endemic Lizards II	p12	a	27 March 2017	<i>Lipinia pulchella</i>
64	Awaited	Endemic Lizards II	p12	a	27 March 2017	<i>Brachymeles bicolor</i>
65	Awaited	Endemic Lizards II	p12	a	27 March 2017	<i>Pseudogekko brevipes</i>
66	Awaited	Endemic Lizards II	p12	a	27 March 2017	<i>Pseudogekko smaragdinus</i>
67	Awaited	Endemic Lizards II	p7	a	27 March 2017	<i>Bronchocela marmorata</i>
68	Awaited	Endemic Lizards II	p7	a	27 March 2017	<i>Gonocephalus sophiae</i>
69	Awaited	Endemic Lizards II	p7	a	27 March 2017	<i>Tropidophorus misaminus</i>
70	Awaited	Endemic Snakes	p12	a	16 August 2017	<i>Boiga philippina</i>
71	Awaited	Endemic Snakes	p12	a	16 August 2017	<i>Boiga dendrophila divergens</i>
72	Awaited	Endemic Snakes	p12	a	16 August 2017	<i>Trimeresurus flavomaculatus</i>

Cont'd. Table 1. Herpetological stamps issued by the Philippines.

SI	SG	Series Name	Face value	Code	Date of issue	Species depicted
73	Awaited	Endemic Snakes	p12	a	16 August 2017	<i>Malayotyphlops ruficaudus</i>
74	Awaited	Endemic Snakes	p25	a	16 August 2017	<i>Chrysopelea paradisi variabilis</i>
75	Awaited	Endemic Snakes	p25	a	16 August 2017	<i>Lycodon ferromi</i>
76	Awaited	Endemic Snakes	p25	a	16 August 2017	<i>Rhabdophis lineatus</i>
77	Awaited	Endemic Snakes	p25	a	16 August 2017	<i>Dryophiops philippina</i>
78	-	Endemic Snakes	- (on selvage)	a	16 August 2017	<i>Trimeresurus flavomaculatus</i>

The country's first such stamp (Fig. 1), under its official postal administration appeared on 5 October 1982, under the series 10th Anniversary of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP). It depicts a Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas* on a 40 centavo (= PHP 0.40) stamp. The commemorative issue was significant as UNEP, at this meeting, initiated an environmental awards programme for the recognition of prominent individuals or organizations that have made substantial contributions towards environmental protection.

The second issue was from 11 July 1988, again a Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, along with a diver, strangely issued to commemorate the Summer Olympics ("Games of the XXIV Olympiad") of 1988 at Seoul, South Korea (Fig. 2). The design appears in perforate as well as imperforate formats, in a se-tenant strip of four.

The next four stamps and stamp sheetlets depict indeterminate species of marine turtles, two of which appear in releases from the ASEAN Environment Year, 10 August 1995 (Fig. 3) and the International Year of the Reef, 24 October 1997 (Fig. 4). In both cases, although given separate catalog numbers, the postal authority uses the same stamp design. The pattern continues in the release commemorating the International Year of the Ocean, 24 October 1998 (Fig. 5), with the stamp and sheetlet showing a marine scene and depicting a Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas*.

Philippines Post started looking landwards with a release on frogs on 5 April 1999 (Fig. 6). The issue is a significant one, being the first to cover the archipelago's diverse amphibian fauna, commemorated via a four value set of stamps (each of PHP 5), showing *Rhacophorus pardalis*, *Platymantis dorsalis*, *Limnonectes woodworthi*, and *Limnonectes magnus* (Fig. 6). Additionally, there was a sheetlet of three value stamps (also of PHP 5 value) that show *Nyctixalus spinosus*, *Kaloula conjuncta*, and *Pulchrana granocula* (Fig. 6).






The following month, on 11 May 1999, the agency issued a set of four stamps (PHP 5 each), issued in se-tenant, on these islands' marine life, one showing *Laticauda colubrina* (Fig. 7).

The Chinese New Year is the most significant of festive occasions for the Chinese diaspora worldwide, and currently, 77 countries and postal authorities issue commemoratives to mark the event. Of late, the Chinese Shengxiao (Zodiac) Philatelic Society has been organizing a philatelic contest to recognise the best Chinese zodiac stamps. Therefore, with a twinge of disappointment, herpetologists saw the North American Corn Snake, *Pantherophis guttatus* on stamps and sheetlets from the country, issued on 20 December 2000. The two designs (of PHP 5 and 11), showing a regular color morph and an albinistic one, appear both as separate stamps as well as on miniature sheets, in perforate and imperforate formats (Fig. 8). However, the sheetlets themselves look festive enough, with additional undenominated tabs, showing stylized snakes as well as illustrated selvage on top.

The next few releases revert back to the favorite theme-marine life. On 3 February 2001, at the Hong Kong International Stamp Exhibition, held 1–5 February 2001 in Hall 1 of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Philippines issued a stamp and a sheetlet (Fig. 9) showing a Hawksbill Sea Turtle, *Eretmochelys imbricata* (PHP 5 and 11, respectively). Marine theme continued with a se-tenant block of four on the theme "Fisheries and Coastal Resources Conservation", issued on 24 June 2002 (Fig. 10), that include a stamp showing an indeterminate sea turtle (PHP 5).

The American Corn Snake, *Pantherophis guttatus* made a perhaps unwelcome return in a release from 9 September 2004, from a sheet entitled "The Twelve Animals of the Lunar New Year Cycle". Issued on 9 September 2004, each of the 12 stamps (of PHP 6 face value each) features an animal from the Chinese zodiac (Fig. 11).

Table 2. Herpetological cancellations from the Philippines.

SI	SG	Series Name	Description	Date of issue	Species	Cancellation
1	3234–3237; MS3238	Endemic Philippine Frogs	4-value stamps; four stamps in miniature sheet	4 April 1999	<i>Rhacophorus pardalis</i>	
2	4495–4498; MS4499	Philippine Endemic Lizards	4-value stamps; four stamps in miniature sheet	30 August 2011	<i>Brachymeles elerae</i>	
3	4538–4541; MS4542	Philippine Endemic Frogs	4-value stamps; four stamps in miniature sheet	15 December 2011	<i>Limnonectes macrocephalus</i>	
4	Awaited	Philippine Endemic Lizards 2	4-value stamps; four stamps in miniature sheet	27 March 2017	<i>Pseudogekko smaragdinus</i> (but with a dark vertebral stripe)	
5	Awaited	Philippine Endemic Snakes	4-value stamps; four stamps in miniature sheet	16 August 2017	<i>Trimeresurus flavomaculatus</i>	

Marine turtles, representing all the known local species, appear in the next release, a well-designed issue from 31 March 2006 (Fig. 12), the four stamps of PHP 7 value each, the sheetlet indicated as of PHP 26 value. The stamp sets depict *Lepidochelys olivacea*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Caretta caretta*, and *Dermochelys coriacea*; the sheetlet shows a *Chelonia mydas*.

Between 29 March 2010 and 20 January 2011, the Philippines released a series of 37 stamps under a new definitive series on marine biodiversity. One of these (a PHP 5 stamp), issued 18 November 2010, features a Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas* (Fig. 13).

Two species of crocodilians occur in the archipelago, and while the Saltwater Crocodile, *Crocodylus porosus* has appeared in dozens of stamps worldwide, the endemic Philippine Crocodile, *Crocodylus mindorensis*, which is listed as ‘Critically Endangered’ in the IUCN Red List (IUCN 2020), appears to have been thus far neglected. Matters were set right on 16 May 2011, when Philippines Post released a set of four stamps (PHP 7 each), depicting the species (Fig. 14).

One of the most attractive herpetological stamps brought out by the country was in the series from 30 August 2011, entitled “Philippines Endemic Lizards” (Fig. 15). The species depicted are endemics to the islands and many obscure or then recently described. The authorities worked with the Philippine National Museum staff herpetologist, Arvin Cantor Diesmos, to get accurate portrayal of these species. The four value stamps appear in sets of four on each sheet, and depict the following species in each stamp (of PHP 7 face value): *Otosaurus cumingi*, *Gekko carusadensis*, *Cyrtodactylus mamananwa*, and *Parvoscincus leucospilos* (under its older name, *Sphenomorphus leucospilos*). The stamp sheetlet is composed of four stamps (PHP 7 each) and depict *Gonocephalus sophiae*, *Tropidophorus grayii*, *Hydrosaurus pustulatus*, and *Brachymeles elerae*. The top left quarter of the sheetlet has an *Otosaurus cumingi* (under an earlier name, *Sphenomorphus cumingi*), printed across two undenominated tabs.

The next release is the second series of an earlier theme, on the endemic frogs of the Philippines (Fig. 16). The date of issue is 15 December 2011, and the contents include four stamps (PHP 7 each) and a sheetlet of four stamps (also of the same denomination). Species depicted on the stamps are *Nyctixalus spinosus*, *Platymantis pygmaeus*, *Barbourula busuangensis*, and *Platymantis biak*. The sheetlet shows *Rhacophorus pardalis*, *Kaloula kalingensis*, *Sanguirana igorata*, and *Alcalus mariae* (under its earlier name, *Ingerana mariae*), besides an undenominated tab showing *Limnonectes macrocephalus*.

It is the year 2013, which brings back the ‘Year of the Snake’. This time around, the Corn Snake is replaced by an indeterminate species of cobra, *Naja*, on a release from 12 December 2012 (Fig. 17). The two snake stamps are of PHP 10 and 30, while the sheetlet has the same design and denomination, reproduced in sets of two. Additionally, the broad selvage on the right bears an image of the Indian Cobra, *Naja naja*.

A large sheet was issued on 2 August 2013 on the theme “Marine Biodiversity” (Fig. 18). No herpetological species feature on the eight triangular stamps (PHP 10 each) but the top left (the ‘northwestern corner’ of philatelists) of the sheetlet has a swimming Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas*. This beautiful sheet was reissued 28 November 2018, overprinted with the logo of the Thailand World Stamp Exhibition, held in Bangkok, 28 November to 3 December 2018 (Fig. 19).

The Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, appears again in a release on 14 October 2013 (Fig. 20), entitled “50th Fish Conservation Week”. The release commemorates the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and included three se-tenant stamps in a sheetlet, each of face value PHP 10. Herpetologists will recollect that the American herpetologist – World War II spy (Borrell, 2013), Edward Harrison Taylor (1889–1978), was Chief of its precursor, the Division of Fisheries, Manila, between 1916–1920.

On 11 November 2015, the country issued a vertical sheetlet commemorating the wildlife of the Philippines via a sheetlet of PHP 15 x 4 (Fig. 21) that depicts four species, including the Philippines Sail-fin Lizard, *Hydrosaurus pustulosus*. Although based on photographs, rather than the typical imagery seen in the country’s stamps, the bright green cast on the lizard does not reflect the true color known in this species.

On 27 March 2017, a series entitled “Philippines Endemic Lizards II” (Fig. 22) was released, comprising four stamps (PHP 12 each) depicting *Gekko gigante*, *Lipinia pulchella*, *Brachymeles bicolor*, and *Pseudogekko brevipes*. The accompanying sheetlet comprise four stamps (also PHP 12 each), which show *Pseudogekko smaragdinus*, *Bronchocela marmorata*, *Gonocephalus sophiae*, and *Tropidophorus misaminius*. A large image of *Varanus olivaceus*, perhaps the most famous of the country’s herpetofauna, a frugivorous varanid, sprawls across two undenominated portions of the sheetlet.

The last series to be discussed is arguably Philippines finest, and cover the last great group not dealt with in detail (excluding a marine snake and the exotic or unrecognisable species from Chinese New Year). On 16 August 2017, the postal



Figure 1. SG 1707, “10th Anniversary of United Nations Environmental Programme” (*Chelonia mydas*).



Figure 2. SG 2091 (perforate, left; imperforate, right), “Olympic Games, Seoul (1st Issue)” (*Chelonia mydas*).



Figure 3. SG 2762 and MS2764 (stamp on top; sheetlet at bottom), “ASEAN Environment Year 1995” (Indeterminate sea turtle).

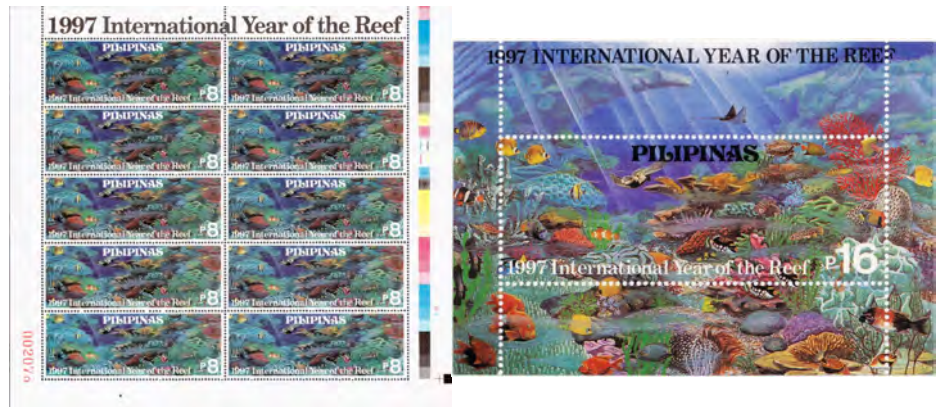


Figure 4. SG 3021 and MS3022 (stamp with white edges, left; sheetlet, right), “International Year of the Reef” (Indeterminate sea turtle).



Figure 5. SG 3166 and MS3167 (stamp, with white edges, top; sheetlet, bottom), “International Year of the Ocean” (*Chelonia mydas*).



Figure 6. SG 3234–3237; MS3238a–3238c (stamps, left; sheetlet, right), “Endemic Philippine Frogs” (*Rhacophorus pardalis*, *Platymanthis dorsalis*, *Limnonectes woodworthi*, *Limnonectes magnus*, *Nyctixalus spinosus*, *Kaloula conjuncta* and *Pulchrana granocula*).



Figure 7. SG 3242, “Marine Life” (*Laticauda colubrina*).



Figure 8. SG 3391–3392; MS3393a–3393b (stamps, top; sheetlets, bottom), “New Year. Year of the Snake” (*Pantherophis guttatus*).



Figure 10. SG MS3505, “Fisheries and Coastal Resources Conservation” (Indeterminate sea turtle).



Figure 9. SG 3401; MS3403c (stamps, on top; sheetlet, bottom), “Hong Kong 2001. International Stamp Exhibition. Flora and Fauna” (*Eretmochelys imbricata*).

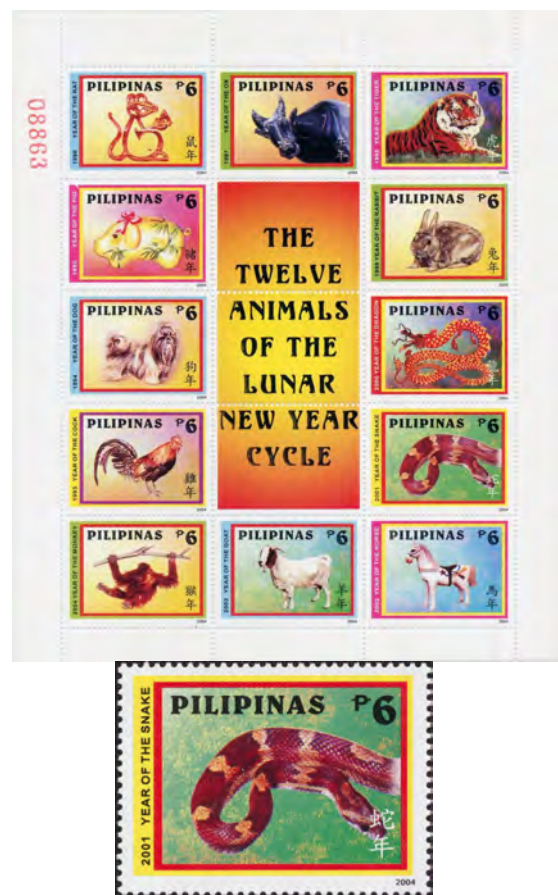


Figure 11. SG 3692 (sheetlet on top), “The Twelve Animals of the Lunar New Year Cycle” (*Pantherophis guttatus* reproduced at bottom).



Figure 12. SG 3870–3873; MS3875 (stamps, top; sheetlet, bottom), “Philippine Marine Turtles” (*Lepidochelys olivacea*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Caretta caretta*, *Dermochelys coriacea* and *Chelonia mydas*).



Figure 13. SG 4308, “Philippines Marine Biodiversity” (*Chelonia mydas*).



Figure 16. SG4538–4541; MS4542a–d (stamps, left; sheetlet, right), “Endemic Frogs (*Nyctixalus spinosus*, *Platymantis pygmaeus*, *Barbourula busuangensis*, *Platymantis biak*, *Rhacophorus pardalis*, *Kaloula kalingensis*, *Sanguirana igorata* and *Alcalus mariae*).

Figure 15. SG4495–4498; MS4499a–d (stamps, top; sheetlet, bottom), “Philippines Endemic Lizards” (*Otosaurus cumingi*, *Gekko carusadensis*, *Cyrtodactylus mamanwa*, *Parvoscincus leucospilos*, *Gonocephalus sophiae*, *Tropidophorus grayii*, *Hydrosaurus pustulatus* and *Brachymeles elerae*).



Figure 14. SG 4458–4461, “Philippine Crocodile” (*Crocodylus mindorensis*).

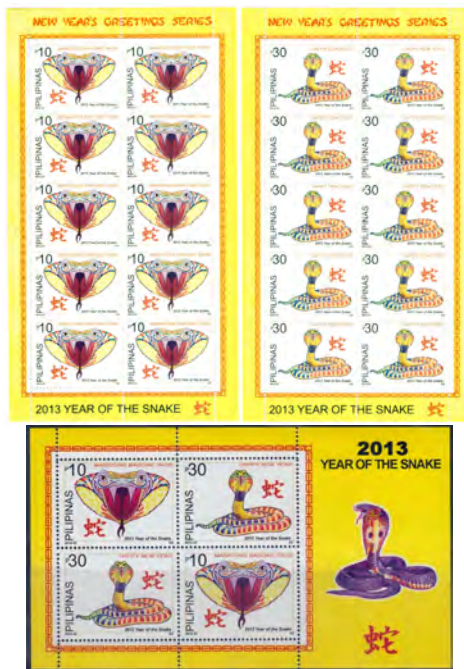


Figure 17. SG 4613–4614; MS4615 (stamps, top; sheetlet, bottom), “Year of the Snake” (Indeterminate species of *Naja*); *Naja naja* on selva of sheetlet.



Figure 18. SG MS4667 “Marine Biodiversity” (*Chelonia mydas*)



Figure 19. SG MS4668 “Marine Biodiversity” (*Chelonia mydas*).



Figure 20. SG 4681, “50th Fish Conservation Week” (*Chelonia mydas*).



Figure 21. SG awaited, “Philippine Wildlife” (*Hydrosaurus pustulosus*).



Figure 22. SG awaited (stamps, top; sheetlet, bottom), “Philippines Endemic Lizards II” (*Gekko gigante*, *Lipinia pulchella*, *Brachymeles bicolor*, *Pseudogekko brevipes*, *Pseudogekko smaragdinus*, *Bronchocela marmorata*, *Gonocephalus sophiae*, and *Tropidophorus misaminius*).



Figure 23. SG awaited (stamps, top; sheetlet, bottom), “Endemic Snakes” (*Boiga philippina*, *Boiga dendrophila divergens*, *Trimeresurus flavomaculatus*, *Malayotyphlops ruficaudus*, *Chrysopelea paradisi variabilis*, *Lycodon ferroni*, *Rhabdophis lineatus*, and *Dryophiops philippina*).

authorities released a series of four stamps (of PHP 12 each) and a sheetlet of four stamps (of PHP 25 each), entitled “Endemic Snakes” (Fig. 23). Snake depicted on the stamps include *Boiga philippina*, *Boiga dendrophila divergens*, *Trimeresurus flavomaculatus*, and *Malayotyphlops ruficaudus*. As with the lizards, these were printed in se-tenant sheets of four sets each, in different sequences. The sheetlet too depicts four species- *Chrysopelea paradisi variabilis*, *Lycodon ferroni*, *Rhabdophis lineatus*, and *Dryophiops philippina*. The broad right selvage of the sheetlet shows a *Trimeresurus flavomaculatus*. In terms of accuracy and aesthetics, these are some of the finest products by the Philippines Post. The sheetlet is printed with a holographic foil, producing a three-dimensional effect that shows off the scales of the snakes.

Cancellations or postmarks bearing herpetofaunal motifs (= pictorial cancellations) have been issued for five of these series (Table 2), and depict recognizable species of amphibians and reptiles, all illustrated in the stamps or respective covers for first day of issue.

Conclusions

The Philippines has done well in its biodiversity issues in philately, and here, we showcase her herpetological stamps. Over the years, the coverage has expanded from solely marine species (such as sea turtles), and reliance on readily available online images of exotic species, to the depiction of rare, endemic and threatened species.

Of the several dozen herpetological species depicted on the stamps of the Philippines, two were described by Alcala and colleagues- an amphibian, *Platymantis pygmaeus* Alcala et al. (1998) and a reptile, *Gekko gigante* Brown and Alcala (1978).

The span of nearly four decades that herpetological stamps depicted in the work show a marked change in the type and quality of images, from relatively garish paintings of species, sometimes within a landscape mosaic, as till 1998; photographs and more skilfully executed stamps (such as the Hong Kong 2001 International Stamp Exhibition issues); to the one most recent on the lizards and snakes of the archipelago (both from 2017). Societal values have changed the second herpetological stamp, issued in 1998 to commemorate the Seoul Olympic Games, issued in perforate and imperforate versions, showing a diver holding a juvenile sea turtle. A cardinal rule at present for scuba and other divers in terms of responsible interactions with marine life is non-contact observations. Recreational diving, for instance, has been shown to have the potential to disturb sea turtles (Hayes et al., 2016), and touching or holding turtles and other animals are not only

strongly discouraged, these actions may, in fact, be illegal in many parts of the world (PADI, 2018).

Sea turtles, as icons for ecotourism and associated with marine life and even the concern of fisheries, dominate philatelic releases. However, the past decade has seen the issue of smaller, more poorly known members of the country’s biodiversity, with the postal authority involving local centers of knowledge to generate accurate images on the stamps.

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