

BIOPHILATELY

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE BIOLOGY UNIT OF ATA
DECEMBER 2021 **VOLUME 70 NUMBER 4**

Planting a Garden?



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Sow your stamps!

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BIOPHILATELY**Editor**

Christopher E. Dahle
1401 Linmar Dr. NE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402
chris-dahle@biophilately.org

Associate Editors

Christopher E. Dahle *Botany*

Dr. Paul A. Mistretta *Fungi*
4148 Commodore Dr., Atlanta, GA 30341
paulmistretta70@gmail.com

Michael J. Prince *Mammalia*
7 Station Rd, Whitchurch, Hampshire RG28 7EP UK
Michael.Prince@bushinternet.com

Glenn G. Mertz *Ornithology*
625 N. Lafayette St., Allentown, PA 18104
gmertz43@gmail.com

Charles E. Braun *New Birds*
7 Winthrop Drive, Aiken, SC 29803
charlesebraun@gmail.com

Dick Roman *Herpetology*
Dick.Roman@SbcGlobal.Net

J. Dale Shively *Ichthyology*
106 Lazy Lane, San Marcos, TX 78666
jdshively@icloud.com

Peter Voice *Invertebrate Zoology*
petervoi@yahoo.com

Donald P. Wright, Jr. *Entomology*
8301 Old Sauk Rd., Apt 250, Middleton WI 53562
don.aa2f@verizon.net

Michael Kogan *Paleontology*
Munich, Germany
admin@paleophilatelie.eu

Vacant *Microbiology*

BIOLOGY UNIT OF ATA

Laurie J. Ryan **President**
4134 Wenbrook Dr, Sharonville, OH 45241
doxiemom7@gmail.com

Glenn G. Mertz **Vice-President**
625 N. Lafayette St., Allentown, PA 18104
gmertz43@gmail.com

Christopher E. Dahle **Secretary/Treasurer**
1401 Linmar Dr. NE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402
chris-dahle@biophilately.org

Directors

Alan J. Hanks (Ontario) (President Emeritus)
John Pereira (Massachusetts)
Dr. Frederick C. Skvara (New Jersey)
Donald P. Wright, Jr. (Wisconsin)
Dick Roman (Missouri)

Publisher**Librarian**

Mark Reineke
925 Boychuk Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7H 4L6 Canada
mikadoate@sasktel.net

Website

www.biophilately.org

The Biology Unit, founded in 1951, is a study unit of the American Topical Association dedicated to the international cooperative study of biological postage stamps and related material.

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GREEN-THUMB PHILATELY

POSTAGE STAMPS WITH EMBEDDED SEEDS

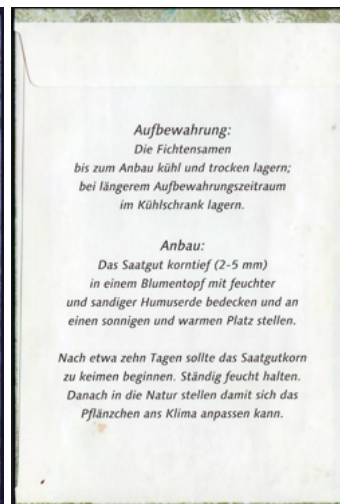
Indraneil Das (BU1857) and Genevieve V. A. Gee

Introduction

Postal agencies of as many as 14 nations have issued postage stamps that have embedded seeds of various types. These have been issued to highlight different issues, from fighting desertification, loss of forest cover, and soil erosion, to promotion of kitchen gardens (hence, contribute to national food security), urban gardening, and commemoration of important events (such as World War I), World Fertility Day or the birthday of the King of Thailand (also, a prominent agronomist). To add a further 'green touch', one of them was printed on recyclable paper, another on biodegradable paper, and some others have seeds placed within biodegradable plastic.

Commemorative Stamps

An example (Fig. 1) in the environmental protection category includes a souvenir sheet of face value €1.70 (SG MS3312, Scott 2336) issued from Austria, on 8 September 2011, to commemorate the International Year of the Forest. Issued in cooperation with the Federal Forestry Company, the sachet-



format stamp block contains a mixture of seeds of the Austrian Spruce or pine trees (*Pinus nigra*) from the Tyrol, the Salzkammergut, the Waldviertel, Styria, and Carinthia regions. The species is a coniferous evergreen tree that reaches 55 metres and can be long-

Fig. 1. Austria, International Year of the Forest (SG MS3312, Scott 2336. A. Front. B. Planting instructions.

lived, with some exceeding 500 years old.

On 26 June 2015, Spain issued a single stamp (face value €0.90; SG 4967, Scott #4054) to commemorate the International Year of the Soil (Fig. 2). It contained embedded *Petunia* (*Petunia sp.*) seeds, with the slogan 'Renew the Soil - Plant Me'. Also depicted on the stamp was a forest image, contrasting with that of a barren landscape, showing soil erosion. Although of South American origin, hybrids of the *Petunia* are common ornamental plants worldwide.

A third example of such 'conservation' stamps was issued by the United Arab Emirates on 31 March 2011, under the theme 'Save the Ghaf Tree' (Fig. 3). The sheetlet (SG 1071–1072, Scott #1016) of face value Dirham (AED) 40 (containing two stamps of face value AED 1 and 4), feature the tree, with the higher value stamp being embedded on the embroidered canopy in the image, with the fiber and seeds of the Ghaf (*Prosopis cineraria*). The Ghaf Tree is part of the Emirates



Fig. 2. Spain, International Year of the Soil (SG 4967, Scott #4054).

landscape and local culture, and the souvenir sheet with a large seed is covered by tree fiber. An evergreen, drought-tolerant tree of the desert, it was declared as the national tree of the Emirates in 2008 because of its cultural significance, as well as keystone function, from combating desertification to improving soil fertility and additionally, serving as source of food, fuel, shelter

and medicine for locals and wildlife. In fact, an Arab saying goes, “Death will not visit a man, even at the time of a famine, if he has a Ghaf, a goat, and a camel, since the three together will sustain a man”.

Seeds have also been issued to commemorate special events. The most poignant may be the ones issued by the island of Jersey, in the British Isles, to remember fallen soldiers of World War I, the Poppy seed.



Fig. 3. United Arab Emirates, 'Save the Ghaf Tree' (SG 1071–1072, Scott #1016).



Fig. 4. Jersey, 'Remembrance Poppy' (SG 1824–1825, Scott #1747-48). A. Stamps ▲. B. Front of packet ◀. C. Back of packet ▼. D. Planting instructions ▶.



Embedded stamp (Fig. 4) is a reminder of the trench warfare that was associated with the event. Two of the lowest (£0.46, 0.56) values from a series issued on 6 May 2014 (SG 1824–1825 Scott #1747-48), entitled 'Remembrance Poppy', show seeds of the Red Poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*), and protected by biodegradable plastic covers. These were also issued in sachets, with planting instructions printed on the packets, and sold for £1.50, half of which was donated to the Jersey Branch of the Royal British Legion. This was Jersey Post's effort to raise funds for the Poppy Appeal, the fundraising campaign of the Legion, as well as to commemorate the Centenary of the First World War.

Also commemorative in nature is the release from Thailand, on 17 February 2011, issued to mark the 83th birthday of His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927–2016), a prominent figure and patron of

the nation's agricultural industry. The single stamp (Fig. 5) is of Baht 9 value (SG 3162a, Scott #2567),



Fig. 5. Thailand, 83rd birthday of His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927–2016), stamp sheet (SG 3162a, Scott #2567).

and features a single grain of rice (*Oryza sativa*). Significantly, the rice was produced by the Chitralada Royal Experimental Rice Field, inside the royal compound, and used in the Royal Ploughing Ceremony 2010. A sheetlet of stamps with the same design was also sold within Thailand, and issued in a special folder (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Thailand, 83rd birthday of His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927–2016), stamp sheetlet in folder (SG 3162a, Scott #2567).



Fig. 7. San Marino, 'Fertility Day' (SG 2400, Scott #1963).

Another commemorative example comes from San Marino, in Europe. This enclave of Italy, on 7 June 2016, issued a se-tenant set of three stamps (Fig. 7), one (SG 2400, Scott #11963) of which is of face value €2.50, bearing a Dwarf Petunia (*Petunia nana compacta*) seed, protected by plastic film. The occasion for its release was the Italian Fertility Day, celebrated on 7 May, with the aim of the stamp set to emphasize parenthood, health and wellness of the child. The symbolism of the seed is employed to show life as an embryo or seed. An additional feature is the yellow fluorescent printing, visible under ultraviolet light.

Flowering Stamps

The final commemorative stamp to be discussed was issued on Earth Day by Morocco. On 22 April 2010, this north African nation issued a single stamp (Fig. 8) of Moroccan dirham 10 value (SG 1264, Scott #11108), with embedded seeds of the Alfalfa or Luzerne (*Medicago sativa*). This perennial flowering plant of the legume family Fabaceae is important as a forage for grazing livestock as well as green manure, relevant to drought-prone Saharan Africa. Significantly, the stamp was printed on 100% recycled paper.

A number of nations have issued stamps with seeds of flowers, to enhance urban landscapes and promote gardening. The first to be mentioned, also the first postal issuing authority to issue such stamps, was by the Netherlands, which issued an attractive sheetlet of 10 stamps on 1 May 2007, entitled 'Flowers of the World' (Fig. 9). Each of face value €0.44 (x 8) and €0.55 (x



Fig. 8. Morocco, 'Earth Day' (SG 1264, Scott #1108).

(SG MS2593, Scott #1290) have seeds of Pink Petunia (*Petunia sp.*), Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum sp.*) and Lobelia (*Lobelia sp.*). Seeds are protected by plastic film and planting instructions are on the left and right selvages of the sheetlet. A similar sheetlet was prepared by Austria Post but remains unissued.

Belgium, on 15 March 2010, issued a set entitled 'Blossoming Flowers' at the Flower and Plant Exhibition at Ghent (Fig. 10). The two stamps (SG 4294–4295, Scott #2421a,b) of "1" face value (in x 5 format) are good for First Class Mail, the seeds attached to the southwest corner of selvage being of Jasmine Tobacco (*Nicotiniana alata*) and Rose Campion (*Lychnis coronaria*). The stamps themselves show blossoming flowers

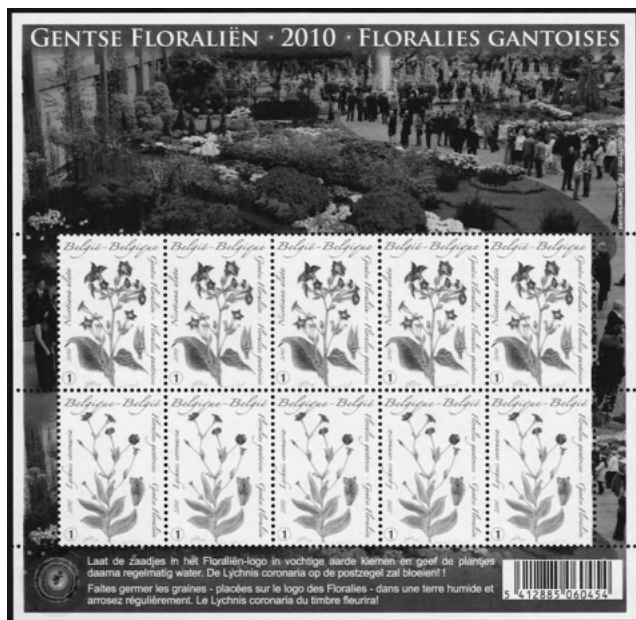


Fig. 10. Belgium, 'Blossoming Flowers' (SG 4294–4295, Scott #2421a,b).

Council, an international non-profit, organization promoting responsible management of forests) recycled paper, and was for "Lettre Prioritaire" (currently, €1.16). Embedded on five corresponding stamps of the sheetlet are seeds of the Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), Golden Marguerite (*Anthemis tinctoria*), Coquelicot or Wild Corn Poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*), Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) and Arbre aux Papillons or Summer Lilac (*Buddleja davidii*).

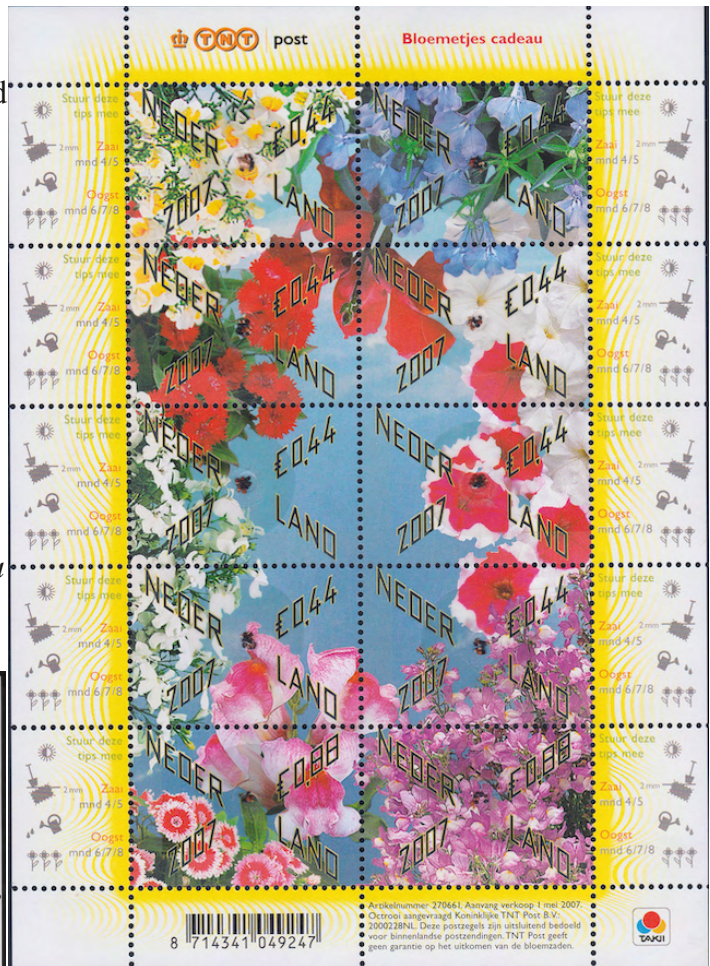


Fig. 9. Netherlands, 'Flowers of the World' (SG MS2593, Scott #1290).

of these two species.

France, on 26 February 2011, issued a set on Stamp Day, entitled 'Protection of the Soil. Seeds of France', along with a folder (Fig. 11). The set, with 10 stamps, was printed on FSC (Forest Stewardship



Fig. 11. France, 'Stamp Day', 'Seeds of France' (SG and Scott uncatalogued).

The most recent stamp with embedded seeds was released on 20 May 2021 by the northern European nation of Estonia, that lies along the Baltic coast. The poppy stamp (SG awaited) was issued on 20 May 2021 (Fig. 12), and depicts a blooming flower of the Red Poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*), of face value €4. The seeds are embedded on the stamp, and protected by plastic film. The Red Poppy is an annual, blooming between May and August, and prefers limestone habitats, while being a favorite ornamental plant. A related trivia is that opium, essential for medicinal use and in the illegal drug trade, is the dried latex derived from the seed capsules of a relative, the Opium Poppy (*Papaver somniferum*).

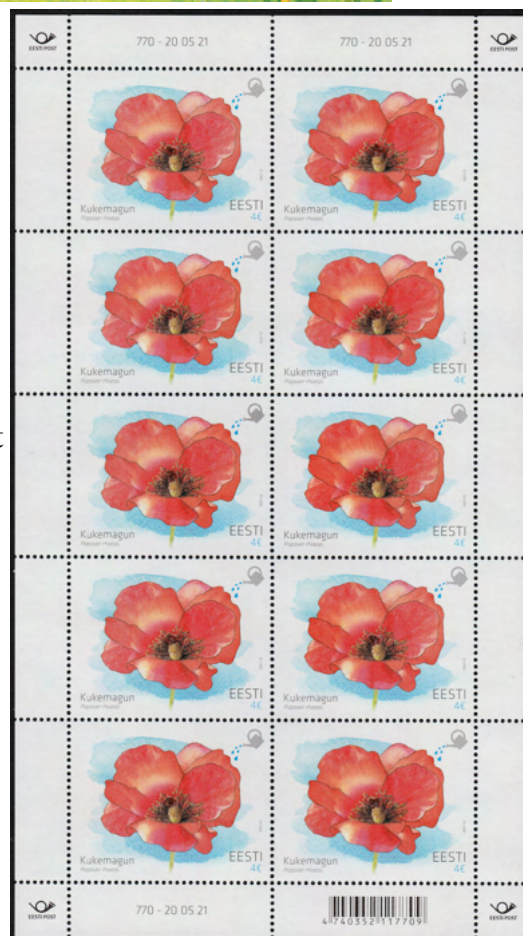


Fig. 12. Estonia, 'Poppy Stamp' (SG awaited).

The final country to be listed in this philatelic category is the city state of Singapore, in southeast Asia.



Fig. 13. Singapore, 'Our City in a Garden', self-adhesive sheetlet (SG 2124, Scott #1612). A. Front. B. Back, showing planting instructions.



On 13 July 2013, Singapore Post issued two products with seeds, under 'Our City in a Garden' series. The first, a self-adhesive sheetlet (SG 2124, Scott #1613), bearing stamps of 1st Local value (others, lacking seeds, for 50c, 80s and S\$1.10 stamps for international mail; Fig. 13), the second, a collector's sheet of S\$5 face value (but officially sold for S\$8; Fig. 14). The

seeds of Japanese Rose (*Portulaca grandiflora*) were embedded on these stamps, to promote greening of the city state. The plant, a creeper producing flowers that bloom year-round. Planting instructions on reverse of the illustrated first product, and the two designs are identical, except the second item shows a different face value, as well as the absence of Merlion (the state symbol) on the northeast corner, and has embossed translucent foil over elements of biodiversity on selvage. The living seeds in both products were protected by plastic film and were the country's first stamps printed on biodegradable paper.

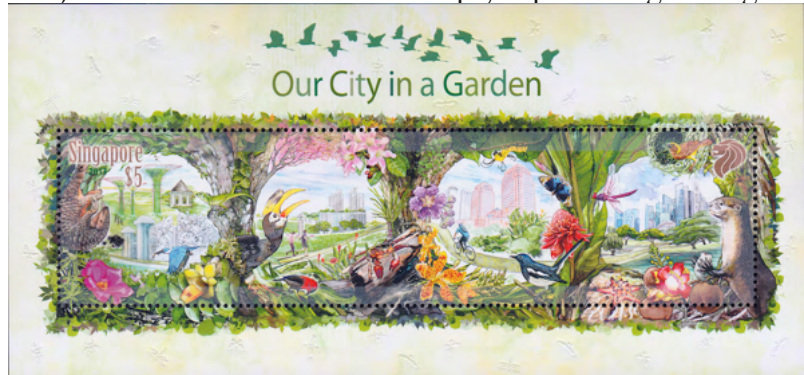


Fig. 14. Singapore, 'Our City in a Garden', collector's sheet (SG uncataloged, Scott #1612).

Food Security Stamps



Fig. 15. Left. Trinidad and Tobago, 'Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition,' single stamp (SG 1205, Scott #894), without seed.

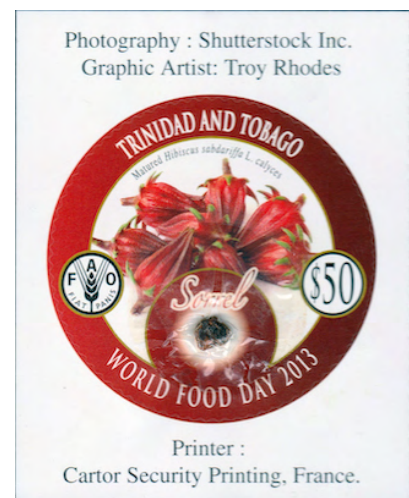


Fig. 16. Right. Trinidad and Tobago, 'Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition,' miniature sheet (SG 1206, Scott #895).

On the occasion of World Food Day, on 4 December 2013, Trinidad and Tobago issued a series entitled "Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition". All centered around Sorrel (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*). The series comprises a single stamp (Fig. 15) of face value \$1 (SG 1205, Scott #894), a miniature sheet (Fig. 16) of \$50 (SG 1206, Scott #895) and a sheetlet of five stamps (Fig. 17), \$1 (x 1), \$2.50 (x 1), \$3.75 (x 1), \$4.50 (x 1), \$5.25 (x 1) (SG MS 1207, Scott #896). The seeds were protected by plastic film in all the products, except the single stamp. The Sorrel was selected for the series to highlight food security, having edible seeds, roots, branches, leaves, blossoms and fruits, and used for making jams, jellies, gelatin, desserts, puddings, cakes, ice creams, drinks, besides its medicinal purposes.



Fig. 17. Trinidad and Tobago, 'Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition,' sheetlet of stamps (SG MS1207, Scott #896).



Fig. 18. Above. New Zealand, 'Grow Your Own / Sustainable New Zealand', embedded seeds (SG 3927).

Fig. 19. Below. New Zealand, 'Grow Your Own / Sustainable New Zealand', seedless (SG 3927).



On 4 October 2017, New Zealand issued a set entitled 'Grow Your Own / Sustainable New Zealand'. The sheetlet (SG 3927) included six stamps, illustrating vegetables, including Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*), Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), Carrot (*Daucus carota sativus*), Broccoli (*Brassica oleracea var. italica*), and Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*). Stamps are pentagonal, and of face value NZ\$1 (x 2); NZ\$2.20 (x 1); NZ\$ 2.30 (x 1); NZ\$ 2.70 (x 1); NZ\$ 3.30 (x 1). Since export of seeds out of New Zealand (and into many countries) are not permitted by law (unless accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate), versions with embedded seeds (Fig. 18) and seedless (Fig. 19) were produced, the former with a biodegradable plastic seed pouch.



Fig. 20. An international cover from the Netherlands to Malaysia, bearing two 'seeded' stamps (part of SG MS2593, Scott #1290) that successfully completed its journey.

This article leads the reader through the garden of plantable stamps. It has been mentioned that, due to often strict rules governing the import of seeds, many such issues are solely for local mail. However, illustrated is an example of one from Netherlands that slipped through and made it to its recipient overseas (Fig. 20).

Acknowledgments: The first author thanks the Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, for support of his research.