

BIOPHILATELY

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Are you comfortable in your skin?



Do you have skin
in the game?

Stamps with real skin or embossing to look like scales.

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DERMAL PHILATELY: STAMPS HIGHLIGHTING SKIN, FUR, FEATHER, AND SCALES

Indraneil Das (BU 1857) and Genevieve Gee

Introduction

The skin is the largest and heaviest organ, weighing 12–15% of body mass in humans. Its multiple functions include protecting tissues and organs, storing water, vitamin D, fat and glucose, regulating body temperature, shielding the body from harmful ultra-violet rays and acting as the first line of defense against infectious diseases. Many sensory receptors are located along the skin surface- from heat and cold to touch and pressure. Derived from the epidermis, the outermost skin layer, a variety of structures can be found in the animal kingdom, from hair and fur to scales and feathers.

In this article, we describe stamps that are based on the integumentary system, comprising the skin, and its main derived product, leather. Also dealt with are material, such as flocked paper or metallic foil, or processes, such as embossing, used to produce stamps to mimic the surface structures of animals, such as fur, feathers and scales that are modifications of the skin. Entries are listed in taxonomic order.

Fish Skin

Posta, the stamp issuing authority of the Faroe Islands, administered by Denmark, on 26 September 2016 issued a single stamp to which a real piece of fish skin is attached (SG 760, Scott 668). The DKK 50 stamp has an affixed piece of skin of the Atlantic Cod (*Gadus morhua*) (Fig. 1). The source of the unusual attachment was the North Atlantic fish exporter, Nevið in Runavík, Faroe Islands and was tanned by Atlantic Leather in Iceland. Fish skin tanning is an ancient art, and leather from the cod is reportedly more durable than cow leather, and used in the manufacture of shoes, bags and watchbands.



Fig. 1. Faroe Islands, 26 September 2016, fish skin (SG 760, Scott 668).

Reptile Scales

Empresa Brasileira de Correios e Telégrafos, the postal authority of Brazil issued a dazzlingly beautiful single stamp (SG 3188, Scott 2781) on 24

January 2001, on the occasion of the Chinese Lunar New Year at the Hong Kong 2001 International Stamp Exhibition. The stamp depicts a stylized snake and is of face value R\$1.45. The scales are

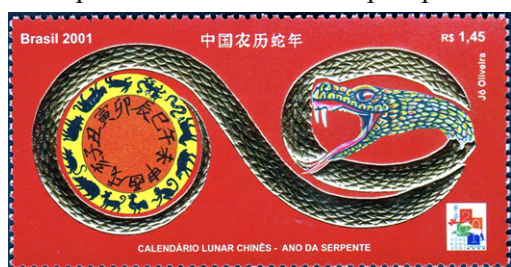


Fig. 2. Brazil, 24 January 2001, gold-foiled and embossed (SG 3188, Scott 2781).

highlighted using gold-foiling and embossing techniques (Fig. 2). Snake body scales form rows of odd numbers, and tend to be enlarged on the belly, and more rounded on the body, and their counts often the traditional basis of species identification.

On 11 January 2014, Hong Kong Post issued a miniature sheet (SG MS1842, Scott 1616), foiled with silver as well



as 22 carat gold on granite paper (by Cartor Security Printing of La Loupe, France, associated with fine philatelic products) to commemorate the end of the Chinese Lunar Year of the Snake and start of the Lunar Year of the Horse. The face value of the sheetlet is HK\$100 (each stamp HK\$50). The snake image is silver foiled, to enhance the head scales (Fig. 3).

The same design was reproduced in a single stamp (SG 1929), issued se-tenant with three other animals of the

Fig. 3. Hong Kong, 11 January 2014, gold- and silver-foiled on granite paper (SG MS1842, Scott 1616).



Fig. 4. Hong Kong, 24 January 2015, gold foiled (SG 1928–1931).

holographic foil printed miniature sheet, with a hand sculptured embossed figure (SG MS4974) of a Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). The larger image on selvage to left shows the anterior half of the animal, the carapace scutes embossed. Each of the four A\$1 stamp shows the entire animal, which bear embossing of carapace scutes and additional holographic features to show shoals of fish (Fig. 5). Day 3 saw the release of a copper-foiled sheetlet (SG MS4975), with hand-sculpted embossed figure of an Olive Sea Snake (*Aipysurus laevis*). A large version appears on the selvage on the left, while each of the four A\$1 stamp has a smaller version of the image. The copper-foiled image accurately shows all scales of the snake's head in frontal view (Fig. 6).

Canada Post, on 8 January 2013, issued a single stamp (SG 2906, Scott 2599) to commemorate the Chinese Lunar New Year of



Fig. 8. Canada, 8 January 2021, foil stamping and embossed (SG 3541–3552, Scott 3259).

the Snake (Fig. 7). On 24 January 2015 (SG 1928–1931), the other animals being dragon, horse and ram, each of HK\$10 value (Fig. 4). This version is gold-foil embossed, although squamation features of the snake appear less distinct than the original version.

Australia Post, on the occasion of the 35th Asian International Stamp Exhibition “Macau 2018”, 21–24 September 2018, issued four Great Barrier Reef-themed miniature sheets, one on each day of the show. These were produced by its production arm, Sprintpak. On Day 2 was the release of a clear laser



Fig. 5. Australia, 22 September 2018, clear laser holographic foiled and hand-sculptured embossed (SG MS4974).



Fig. 6. Australia, 23 September 2018, copper-foiled and hand-sculptured embossed (SG MS4975).

the Snake (Fig. 7). On 15 January 2021, the stamps from the set, representing the 12 zodiac animals, were reissued in the form of a sheetlet (SG 3541–3552, Scott 3259), retaining the respective face values (Fig. 8). In both issues, the foil stamping and embossing applied to the stylized snake motif (the sixth animal in the Chinese Zodiac) highlight the scales on upper parts of the body. These are denominated ‘P’, currently, C\$0.92.



Fig. 7. Canada, 8 January 2013, foil stamping and embossed (SG 2906, Scott 2599).

The postal agency for North Korea issued four miniature

sheets (all SG MS uncatalogued), that had several special features, to commemorate the Bandung 2017, Specialized World Stamp Exhibition, held 3–7 August 2017 at the Trans Studio Convention Center in Bandung, Indonesia, under the Fédération Internationale de Philatélie. Two of these are rectangular, the other two die-cut in a near subcircular shape, all depicting the fauna of Indonesia. One of these, of face value ₩50 depicts the Komodo Dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*), the world's largest as well as heaviest living lizard

(reaching 3 meters and tipping the scale at 70 kilos). The head and extended tongue of the larger image on selva are embossed, while the glittering spot lamination of the entire body produces a remarkable likeness of the small body scales of the species (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. North Korea, 3 August 2017, glittering spot lamination and embossed (SG MS uncatalogued).

Bird Feathers

The Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises (TAAF), or the French Southern and Antarctic Lands has its postal authority, its philatelic issues managed by La Poste, France. On 2 January 2018, TAAF issued a miniature sheet (SG MS844, Scott 586) to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the Madrid Protocol, also known as ‘The Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty for the Protection of the Antarctic Environment’, which was signed on 4 October 1991 in Madrid. The goal of the same is to provide comprehensive protection of the Antarctic, described as ‘the last great wilderness on earth’, through its designation as an international nature reserve, devoted to peace and science. Depicted in the left foreground of the sheetlet (Fig. 10) is a family of Emperor Penguins (*Aptenodytes forsteri*), the parents’ belly region in the sheetlet flocked, resembling the soft feathers of the birds. Penguin feathers are shiny, and uniformly overlap to cover the skin. Further, they are relatively short, broad, dense (about 100 feathers per square inch) and have tufts of down on the feather shafts, all



Fig. 10. Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises, 2 January 2018, flocked paper (SG MS844, Scott 586).

adaptations for waterproofing and keeping warm.



Fig. 11. Malaysia, 13 January 2013, embossed (SG MS1935, Scott 1446).

Pos Malaysia, on 13 January 2013, issued a series entitled “Woodpeckers”. The RM5 miniature sheet (SG MS1935, Scott 1446) shows a family of three White-bellied Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus javensis*), whose wings and crest are beautifully embossed (Fig. 11). It is a species of conservation importance, several subspecies being endangered or extinct.

A gold-foiled miniature sheet was issued by PHLPost, the postal authority of the Philippines, on the occasion of ASEANPEX, held 4–6 November 2017 at Pasay City, Philippines (SG uncatalogued,



Fig. 12. Philippines, 4 November 2017, gold foiling technique (SG uncatalogued, Scott 3746).

Feather too evolved from the epidermis, initially perhaps to keep warm. Described as one of the most complex skin-derived structure, a separate field of science – ‘Plumology’ or plumage science, exists for its study.

Mammal Fur- or Skin-like

Central African Republic, on 2 March 2015, issued a foldable miniature sheet, comprising two tête-bêche stamp sheetlets on card paper at the Asian International Stamp Exhibition 2015 “Taipei 2015”, depicting two Formosan Black Bears (*Ursus thebetanus formosanus*), of face value FCFA500 (x 3) and FCFA1,300 (SG uncatalogued). The same can be made to stand vertically by folding the sheet and gluing the edges. The appearance of the bears is enhanced with black flocked paper (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Central African Republic, 2 March 2015, flocked paper (SG uncatalogued).



Fig. 14. Germany (Brief und Mehr), 10 June 2013, flocked paper (SG uncatalogued).

Brief und Mehr, a private postal company, issued a miniature sheet on 10 June 2013 (SG uncatalogued), depicting an Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*), for the Allwetterzoo Münster, in Westfalen, Germany. The elephant image is printed on flocked paper, to help replicate a smooth feel of the animal (Fig. 14).

On 25 February 2015, Pos Malaysia issued a miniature sheet (SG MS2068), to commemorate the International Cooperative Project on Giant Panda Conservation, with the People’s Republic of China. As part of intergovernmental agreement, a pair of Giant Panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*) was given on a breeding

loan by Beijing to Kuala Lumpur, the pair producing three cubs till early 2022. The sheetlet comprises two RM4 stamps, and the flocked paper gives the effect of fur (Fig. 15).

Hair, restricted to mammals, has a number of critical functions, from insulation (hence, more furry animals in northern climates), acting as waterproofing, sensory use and even for camouflage. In the

stamps highlighted above, details have been achieved through the use of flocked paper, ‘flocking’ itself a technique of depositing numerous small fiber particles onto a surface. Flocked paper can mimic animal surfaces in both permitting use of tactile (touch) senses as well as three-dimensional appearance to a surface.



Fig. 16. Austria, 23 October 2020, leather (SG uncatalogued, Scott 2904).

Numerical Control (CNC) operated milling machine and the silvery surface of aluminum composite was brushed. When viewed from side, the stamp looks like the edges of a ski. A special acrylic gel was used to apply the original yellow ski coating, specially adapted in strength for stamp. The stamp has a face value €7 (SG uncatalogued, Scott 2904) and features a panoramic view of mountains and a skier in action (Fig. 16).

Real Leather or Hair

Skiing has a long tradition in Austria, a central European nation famous for “Sound of Music” and its snowy slopes. On 23 October 2020, Post AG, the agency for Austria, issued an innovative postage stamp- one



Fig. 15. Malaysia, 25 February 2015, flocked paper (SG MS2068, Scott 1541).

depicting a ski tip, made with a real ski coating that uses a combination of wood, aluminum, plastic, and leather. A thin layer of aluminum-plastic composite was cut in the shape of a ski tip using the high-tech Computer



On 25 October 2021, Correos Post, the postal authority of Spain issued an

entirely leather stamp to highlight the trade of leather

Fig. 17. Spain, 25 October 2021, leather (SG uncatalogued).

17). It is part of the ‘Oficios Antiguos’ (ancient trades) series, much anticipated by collectors. Each leather product is decorated by highlighted reliefs that are traditionally done manually. The technique was



Fig. 18. Spain, 25 October 2021, leather (SG uncatalogued), first day cover.

reportedly introduced locally by the Arabs in the Middle Ages, becoming popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. Figs. 18–19 show first day cover and postcard issued with the release.

Tajikistan Post, on 10 December 2020, in collaboration with the Lithuania-based philatelic company, Stamperijia issued a real leather miniature sheet (SG uncatalogued), printed with



Fig. 19. Spain, 25 October 2021, leather (SG uncatalogued), postcard.

gold foil. It commemorates the Chinese Lunar New Year of the Ox 2021 (Fig. 20). It has a face value of Tajikistani Somoni (SM) 20.

Puppetry is a favorite traditional pastime in the multicultural nation of Indonesia. A release from 18 June 2012, at the World Stamp Championship, Jakarta, was a miniature sheet of a puppet piece made of real Buffalo hide (SG MS3427b). It has a face value of IDR20,000 (Fig. 21). As part of the Hindu epic Mahabharat, several characters are featured on the stamp sheetlet, which is popular in the archipelagic nation through performances of Wayang Kulit, a unique puppet theatre that employs light and shadows. Flattened puppet figures



Fig. 21. Indonesia, 18 June 2012, buffalo hide (SG MS3427b).

constructed out of buffalo hide and moved with bamboo sticks produce shadows from oil lamps, and are shown to rural audiences, as part of a travelling show. Domestic Buffaloes (*Bubalus bubalis*) are thought to have descended from the Wild Water Buffalo (*B. arnee*) in south and southeast Asia.

Horse hair is used for a variety of purposes, from the manufacture of upholstery to pottery and jewellery and paint brushes, for stringed instrument bows (such as for the violin), as a fishing line as well as gloves for handling such lines, and as early sutures for plastic surgery. Hair derived from the tail of horses are supposed to bring luck, according to central European lore.

On 1 June 2015, Bpost, the stamp issuing agency of Belgium, issued a €7.20 miniature sheet (SG MS4642, Scott B1184), on the occasion of the annual folk festival of the “Doudou” (or Ducasse de Mons), held at the Grand-Place of Mons, that has a pasted hair of a horse (Fig. 22). The Grand Place becomes a battlefield for Lumeçon, a fight between the good (represented by Saint George) and the evil (depicted by the dragon). The length of the show’s ‘dragon’ is about 10 metres, its tail covered with horse hair. The strand of horse hair on the bottom selvage of the miniature sheet is about 25 cm, and each of the five stamps are of face value €0.72 (the premium charged for the sheetlet thus a clear 100%).

Faux-leather or Skin

Austria Post, on 24 September 2015 issued a single stamp (SG 3364, Scott 2580) of face value €6.30 in the form of leather breeches (Lederhosen), that are either short or knee-length trousers, with buttoned fly flap. Typically made of deerskin, they are hand-sewn. The stamp is made of Alcantara leather, a soft,



Fig. 20. Tajikistan, 10 December 2020, leather (SG uncatalogued).

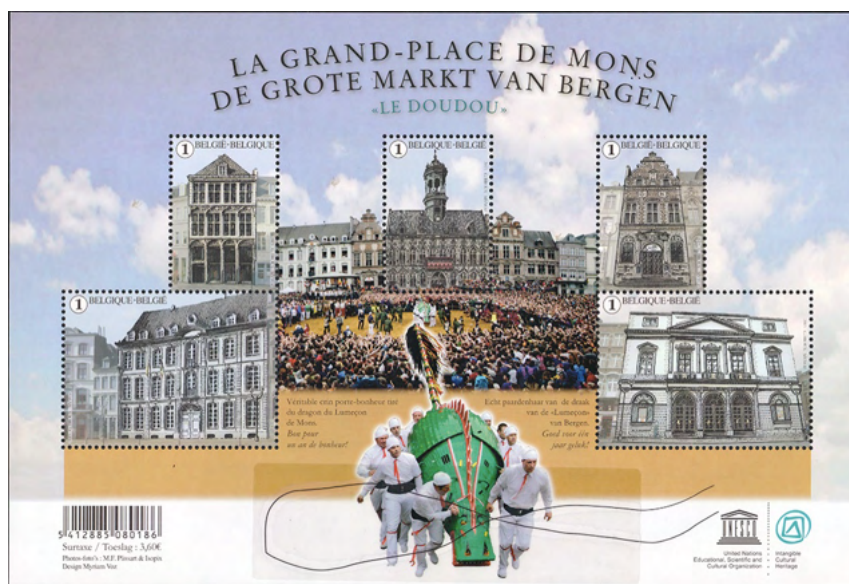


Fig. 22. Belgium, 1 June 2015, horse hair (SG MS4642, Scott B1184).



Fig. 23. Austria, 24 September 2015, Alcantara leather (SG 3364, Scott 2580).

suede-like microfiber, the buttons, traditionally made of buckhorn, are represented in the stamp by six white Swarovski crystals (Fig. 23).

Swiss Post, on 7 May 2015, issued a skin-themed stamp (SG 2061, Scott 1561), at the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia, entitled “Skin Tone”. It is of face value CHF1, and printed on flocked paper, to give a feel of human physical contact (Fig. 24). The stamp is inscribed with “Human

Surface” and is yet another unusual philatelic product from Cartor.

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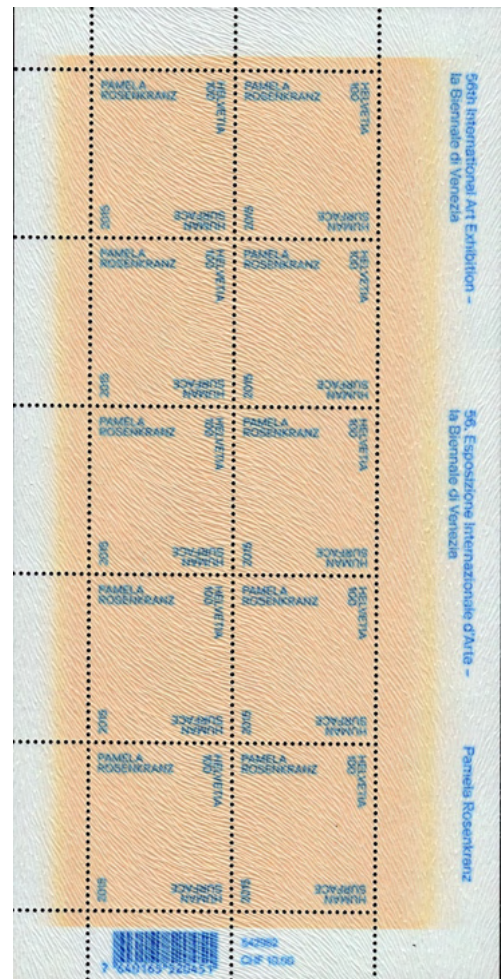
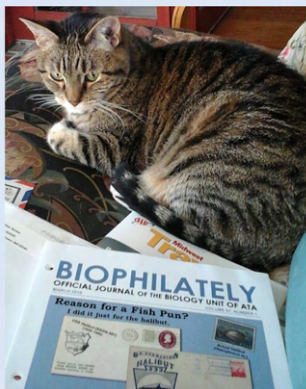


Fig. 24. Switzerland, 7 May 2015, flocked paper (SG 2061, Scott 1561).

Zoey can't hardly wait for the next issue of Biophilately!



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