

Biodiversity of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in fantasy coinage

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Fantasy coins are produced by enterprising individuals and companies, chiefly targetting collectors, rather than to defraud citizens, and considerable literature now exists on the topic (see listing in Cuhaj and Thomas, 2011; Cuhaj, 2012). Geographical entities linked to such products are sometimes curious and include coins purported to be from areas that are within legitimate political entities (such as Easter Island, Galapagos and Greenland), as (sometimes humorous) declaration of independence (including Republic of Texas, Hawaii Islands and Transdnieria), “online nations” or those entirely imaginary (including Atlantis and Lundy), or those that do not have human inhabitants (Antarctica, and even the Moon and Mars) or currencies for role-playing games and others (such as the board game, Monopoly™). A specialist collectors group (The Unrecognised States Numismatic Society), based in California, USA, exists to encourage such hobbyists, which describes itself as “specialising in the study of coins, medallic pieces, banknotes and related numismatic, pseudonumismatic and exonumismatic material issued by unrecognised states, alternative governments, rebel and secessionist groups, political associations, alternative currency promoters, chivalric orders, new country projects, micronations and related entities, commercial organisations, artists, writers, film makers, royal pretenders and exiles, fantasists and utopian visionaries” (<http://www.usns.info>).

The Andaman and Nicobar islands, an archipelago of some 200 islands in the eastern Bay of Bengal, are part of Republic of India, and use currency issued by the Government of India. The only unique coinage of these islands are tokens issued by the Indian Government under British administration, in 1861 (value, 1 Rupee, KM [the standard coin cataloging Krause and Mishler numbering system] #Tn1, 1a–1c; Tn2), and withdrawn from circulation in 1870 (Cuhaj, 2012). Presumably, these tokens were used in the penal colony established at Port Blair, in the Andaman Islands.

A series of eight coins with the words “Andaman and Nicobar Islands”, dated 2011 has been produced by the Osborne Coinage Company, the oldest private mint in the US, based in Cincinnati, Ohio (Table 1; Fig. 1). Their website attribute the designs to Joseph E. Lang (“JL” is visible on the reverse of each of these coins), and feature local biodiversity. Metals used for producing the coins in the series include exclusively copper (25 and 50 paise denominations), copper-nickel (1 and 2 rupees denominations), brass (5 rupees), bimetallic copper-nickel ring with brass centre (10 rupees denomination) and bimetallic copper ring with brass centre (20 rupees denomination). According to the company, 10,000 sets were minted, and these sell at online collectible sites (such as Delcampe and Ebay) for US\$ 11.99–29.99 (equivalent to Indian Rupees, INR 767–1,919 at the exchange rate in early August 2015, or about 300–750% greater than the total face value [INR 38.75] of these coins).

The reverse of each of the coin shows an animal species occurring on these islands, and their values in four languages generally spoken on these islands (Bengali, Hindi, English and Tamil, in sequence in all coins, except in the 50 paise (p) coin, which is Bengali, English, Tamil and Hindi). The obverse shows a fictitious coat of arms of the islands (comprising a palm tree, Arecaceae, in the centre of escutcheon that is supported by two griffons, and surmounted by two banners and the Ashoka Chakra, and a scroll bearing the text “Andaman Islands Nicobar”, in upper case, below the shield). The edges are plain or reeded, and in the highest value (INR 20), both plain and reeded. The low value coins from the series are of single metal, the high value ones (INR 10 and 20) bimetallic, featuring a dugong and a nautilus, respectively. One of the coins show a recently-described species, the Nicobar Gliding Gecko, *Ptychozoon nicobarensis* Das and Vijayakumar, 2009, described by the author of this note and a colleague. All species depicted on these coins are native to these islands.

Table 1. Details of coins purported to be from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, issued in 2011 by the Osborne Coinage, USA. Mintage is 10,000 for all denominations.

Sl	Value	Weight (gm)	Metal	Diameter (mm)	Edge	Species		Inscriptions	
						Common name	Scientific name	Obverse	Reverse
1	25 paise	2.86	copper	19.0	plain	Andaman clubtail butterfly	<i>Losaria rhodifer</i>	"ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS" on top; emblem in centre, date at bottom	Andaman clubtail butterfly; value in four different languages (Bengali, Hindi, English and Tamil)
2	50 paise	3.95	copper	22.0	plain	Stork-billed kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	"ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS" on top; emblem in centre, date at bottom	Stork-billed kingfisher; value in four different languages (Bengali, English, Tamil and Hindi)
3	1 rupee	5.42	copper-nickel	25.00	reeded	Nicobar gliding gecko	<i>Ptychozoon nicobarensis</i>	"ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS" on top; emblem in centre, date at bottom	Nicobar gliding gecko; value in four different languages (Bengali, Hindi, English and Tamil)
4	2 rupees	6.04	copper-nickel	26.00	plain	Coconut crab	<i>Birgus latro</i>	"ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS" on top; emblem in centre, date at bottom	Coconut crab; value in four different languages (Bengali, Hindi, English and Tamil)
5	5 rupees	7.03	brass	23.00	reeded	Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	"ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS" on top; emblem in centre, date at bottom	Wild boar; value in four different languages (Bengali, Hindi, English and Tamil)
6	10 rupees	5.78	copper-nickel outer ring, brass centre	25.00	reeded	Dugong	<i>Dugong dugon</i>	"ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS" on top; emblem in centre, date at bottom	Dugong; value in four different languages (Bengali, Hindi, English and Tamil)
7	20 rupees	8.59	copper outer ring, brass centre	27.00	12 patches each of reeded and plain	Nautilus	<i>Nautilus sp.</i>	"ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS" on top; emblem in centre, date at bottom	Nautilus; value in four different languages (Bengali, Hindi, English and Tamil)



Figure 1: The coin set issued by Osborne Coinage, USA, with “Andaman and Nicobar Islands” inscriptions, issued in 2011.

Collectibles, such as coins and stamps bearing country names, have been issued by separate entities, that are usually profit-making companies. They may also be released for propaganda by nationalistic and/or extremist groups, as well as by governments in exile. Infamous examples for the Subcontinent are the stamps purportedly issued for Nagaland by Clive Harold Feigenbaum (1939–2007) in the 1970s and 1980s (Dufresne, 2002). According to Chapter V, Part 12 of the (Indian) Coinage Act, 2011, “No person shall...use any metal piece as coin whether stamped or unstamped, intended to be used as money except by the authority of the (Indian) Government”. No such intention is evident from either the manufacture or distribution of the aforementioned coins, which, in numismatic terms, are best labelled as *exonomia* (from the Greek, meaning ‘outside of coins’), that includes generally metallic objects such as tokens, medals or scrip, and over time, has even formed the basis of scholarly studies (see van den Vonder and Creemers, 2011).

This note draws attention to the existence of a series of seven coins produced by a private US mint bearing Andaman and Nicobar islands, and illustrating terrestrial and marine faunas of these islands. They have not been authorised by the Government of India, but does not appear to violate the Coinage Act of 2011 in not being used as money. Rather, the production of these coins is for collectors of such esoteric materials within numismatists.

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