

Journal of
Philatelic Society of Kuching, Sarawak

December 2017

Volume 9 No. 2



The Sarawak Philatelist

Journal of

Philatelic Society of Kuching, Sarawak

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Volume 9 No. 2 December 2017

For members only

My Coelacanth Stamps

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The coelacanth (Fig. 1) is an ancient fish, coloured navy blue with silvery spots or can be all brown. It weighs 60 kg and is 170 cm long. It is adapted to live in the deep seas, so when it goes to the surface, the pressure would be too much and it would die, with its eyeballs bursting. The two living species are listed as threatened. They have lobed fins, which have muscles and bones. Lobed fins are very flexible and are generally used for support to move on land. Experts believe that these fins evolved into legs.



Figure 1. An adult and a baby Coelacanth (*Latimeria chalumnae*) at the Natural History Museum London.

There are 2 species of coelacanth. One is *Latimeria chalumnae*- the West Indian Ocean coelacanth, the other is *Latimeria menadoensis*- the Indonesian coelacanth. Coelacanths first appeared in the Devonianian period (between 419 to 359 million years before present). They were thought to have gone extinct in the late Cretaceous, but were rediscovered in 1938, off the coast of South Africa. The first living, breathing coelacanth recorded was *Latimeria chalumnae*, found by Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, who worked in the East London Museum, Cape Town, South Africa. It was formally described by Professor J. L. B. Smith, a South African ichthyologist.

On 23 December 1938, the first specimen was found off the east coast of South Africa, near the mouth of Chalumna River. A fisherman found it and called Latimer and she went to take the coelacanth. When she removed the slime from it, she found what she thought was the most beautiful fish she had ever seen. She took it back to her museum in a taxi and tried to find it in a book without success. Eager to preserve it, she brought it to the morgue, which refused to assist her. She tried to contact J. L. B. Smith to identify it, but to no avail as he was away. She reluctantly gave it to a taxidermist to scale and gut it. When J. L. B. Smith arrived on 16 February 1939, he instantly recognized it as the coelacanth. He gave it the scientific name *Latimeria chalumnae*, after his friend, Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer and the Chalumna River.

The next species of coelacanth, the Indonesian coelacanth, was found by Arnaz and Mark Erdman on 18 September 1997. They found a strange brown coelacanth in the market at Manado Tua while on their honeymoon in Indonesia. Mark took some photos and posted them on the internet. Scientists noticed its significance and soon told Mark to buy a live one and bring it to them. Soon it was declared as a different species and was named *Latimeria menadoensis*.

Table 1 shows the coelacanth stamps I have in my collection at the moment. I have accumulated these over four years, and have stamps from nine countries and 27 stamps in total (Figs. 2–14), in addition to first day covers (Fig. 15) and maximum cards (Fig. 16). I also have a coelacanth banknote (Fig. 17) and a coelacanth coin (Fig. 18).

Table 1. Coelacanth stamps in my collection (as of 25 June 2017).

| Sl | Year | Country | Face Value | Type | Remarks |
|----|------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | 1954 | Comoros | 5 Fr | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 2 | 1954 | Comoros | 10 Fr | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 3 | 1954 | Comoros | 20 Fr | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 7 | 1982 | Madagascar | 450 FMG | Miniature sheet | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 8 | 1989 | Madagascar | 550 FMG | Miniature sheet | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 9 | 1989 | Republic of South Africa | 16 c | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 10 | 1989 | Republic of South Africa | 30 c | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 11 | 1989 | Republic of South Africa | 40 c | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 12 | 1989 | Republic of South Africa | 50 c | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 13 | 1989 | Republic of South Africa | 50 c (x 2) | Miniature sheet | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 14 | 1989 | Republic of South Africa | 50 c | “Wanderers 101” sheetlet | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 15 | 1993 | North Korea | 40 Won | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 16 | 1998 | Mozambique | 2000 MT | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 17 | 2000 | Indonesia | 5000 Rp | Miniature sheet | <i>Latimeria menadoensis</i> |
| 18 | 2000 | Palau | 33 c | Stamp in philateli | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 19 | 2005 | Comoros | 125 FC | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 20 | 2006 | Comoros | 200 FR | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 21 | 2006 | Comoros | 200 FR | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 22 | 2006 | Comoros | 200 FR | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 23 | 2006 | Comoros | 200 FR | Stamp | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 24 | 2008 | Tanzania | 600 Sh | Stamp in philateli | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 25 | 2009 | Comoros | 300 FC | Miniature sheet | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 26 | 2009 | Comoros | 450 FC (x 5) | Sheetlet | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |
| 27 | 2010 | Republic of Guinea | 5000 FG | Stamp in sheetlet | <i>Latimeria chalumnae</i> |



Figure 2. Comoros 1954 (5 f, 10 f and 20 f).



Figure 3. Madagascar 1982 (450 FMG).



Figure 4. Madagascar 1989 (550 FMG).



Figure 5a. Republic of South Africa 1989 (16 c, 30 c, 40 c and 50 c).



Figure 5b. Republic of South Africa 1989 (50 c x 2).



Figure 5c. Republic of South Africa 1989 (50 c).



Figure 6. North Korea 1993 (40 w).



Figure 7. Mozambique 1998 (200 MT).



Figure 8. Indonesia 2000 (5,000 Rp).

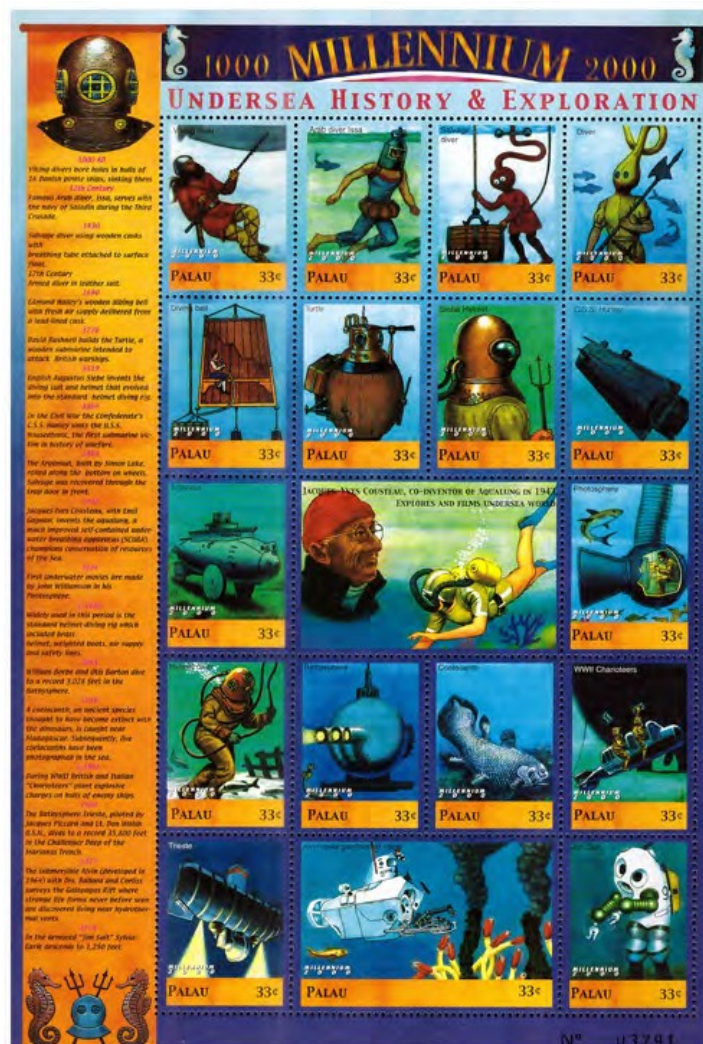


Figure 9. Palau 2000 (33 c).



Figure 10. Comoros 2005 (125 FC).



Figure 11. Comoros 2006 (200 FR x 4).



Figure 12. Tanzania 2008 (500 Sh).



Figure 13a. Comoros 2009 (300 FC).



Figure 13b. Comoros 2009 (450 FC x 5).



Figure 14. Republic of Guinea 2010 (5,000 FG).



Figure 15a. First Day Covers, showing the 1989 stamp issue from South Africa.

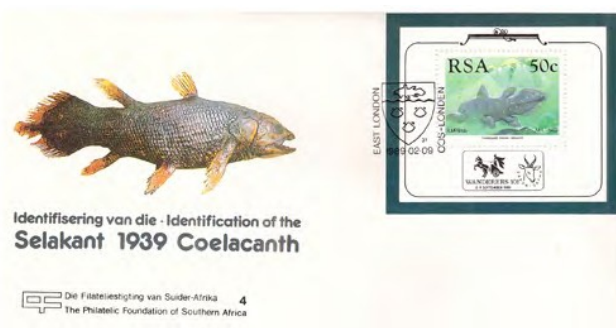


Figure 15b. First Day Covers, showing the 1989 Wanderers 101 sheetlet from South Africa.



Figure 16. Maxicards, showing the 1989 issue from South Africa.



Figure 17. Coelacanth bank note for 1,000 Fr from Comoros (2005).



Figure 18. Coelacanth 5 Fr coin from Comoros (1992).