Birds

17 January 1989

Four stamps will be issued on 17 January to commemorate the centenary of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The problems that stimulated the establishment of the RSPB, especially the killing of wild birds for their decorative plumes, have been replaced by ever greater, very real threats: from river pollution and destruction of heathlands, moorlands, hedgerows and estuaries to illegal shooting, trapping and poisoning of wildlife. The Society's officials and members are busy ensuring the protection of birds and their environment. The Society, with a membership of some 380,000, is based at Sandy in Bedfordshire.



The 19p stamp (first class inland letter basic rate) features one of Britain's favourite sea-birds, the puffin (Fratercula artica) sometimes referred to as the sea-parrot. This bird, best-known for its brightly coloured summer bill, is to be found mainly along the west coast; it builds its nest in a burrow or tunnel on islands or cliffs. One egg is usually laid in June. The puffin feeds mostly on fish, for which it dives and swims under water. The puffin is a comic bird and frequently features in nature programmes on television. Large colonies are to be found in the Shetlands and the puffin features on tourist publicity material for the Islands, including, some years ago, a slogan postmark. The bird is indisputably associated with the island of Lundy in the Bristol Channel, the name Lundy deriving from the Norse for puffin island.





The Puffin

The **27p** stamp (airmail postcards & aerogrammes) depicts the Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), the bird used as the RSPB symbol. This is one of Britain's rarest birds, a summer visitor which breeds on Havergate Island near Orford in Suffolk. The bird is a graceful white wader with a thin black, up-curved bill and very long pale bluish legs. A fully-grown avocet measures about 17 inches in length. A group of these beautiful birds is featured on the front of the presentation pack.



The 32p stamp (airmail Zone B), features the Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), another bird in the Plover family (*Charadriidae*). This bird is chiefly to be found along the rocky and sandy shore, more common on the west than the east. Like the puffin and the avocet, the

oystercatcher has a distinctive bill, in this case a long orange-scarlet one. The nest is built of a few pieces of broken shell in shingle or rocks; three or four eggs are laid in May. The bird feeds on sandworms, shellfish, small fish and shrimps.



The **35p** stamp (airmail Zone C) features the Gannet (*Sula bassana*), one of the largest seabirds, an adult measuring about 36 inches in length and with a wing-span of about six feet. The bird feeds on fish which it can see swimming in the sea from a great height; gannets drop at great speed to catch their prey. The main haunts of the gannet are the rocky isles and stacks of the north and west; large colonies are to be found on St Kilda – at one time the bird was an important part of the islanders' diet.



Gannets build nests of seaweed and grass on rocky ledges, one egg is laid in March or April.

The RSPB runs a number of bird reserves and works closely with landowners and decision-makers in creating a better countryside for birds, and other wildlife. The Society fights damaging developments. To safeguard eggs of rare breed-

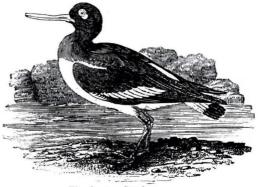
ing birds, such as the osprey, the Society employs wardens to mount round-the-clock guard on individual nests.

Technical Details

The four stamps were designed by Don Cordery, his first set of stamps for the British Post Office and printed in photogravure by Harrison & Sons Limited. They are of vertical format, measuring 30 x 41mm, printed in sheets of 100 on phosphor-coated paper with PVA dextrin gum. Perforation is 14 x 15.

PHQ Cards

PHQ postcards (Nos. 115A-D) featuring each of the four stamps will be available from 2 January, price 16p each.



The Oyster-Catcher

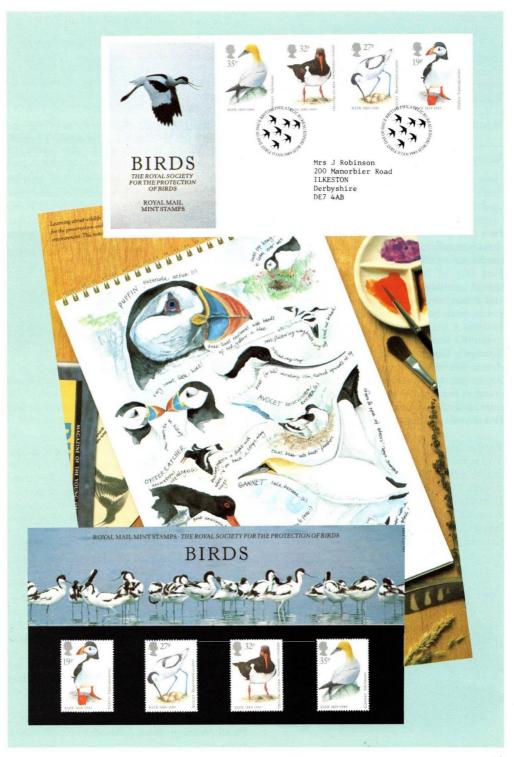
Presentation Pack

The presentation pack (No. 196) will cost £1.35 and was designed by John Gibbs. It gives background information about the work of the Society and includes photographs of cliffs and seashore, ideal habitats respectively for puffins and gannets and avocets and oystercatchers. The pack also includes some fine drawings of the four birds featured on the stamps.

First Day Cover

The FDC envelope will be available approximately two weeks before issue, price 17p. Two pictorial postmarks will be used for the first day cover service, one at the British Philatelic Bureau in Edinburgh and one at Sandy, Bedfordshire (RSPB headquarters).

A first day cover service will be provided by the Bureau with the official Royal Mail cover addressed to the destination required with the four stamps cancelled with either postmark. Application forms, available from the Bureau and main post offices, should be returned not



later than 17 January.

Customers requiring only the special pictorial postmarks may obtain them under the reposting facility by sending on the first day of issue a stamped addressed envelope under an outer cover endorsed "Special First Day of Issue handstamp" to:

British Philatelic Bureau	20 Brandon Street
	EDINBURGH EH3 5TT
Sandy, Beds	Special Postmark Duty Letter District Office
	197 East Road
	CAMBRIDGE CB1 1AA

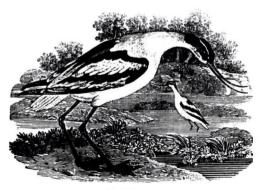
First Day posting boxes will be provided at all main post offices for collectors to post their own covers to receive the standard (non-pictorial) First Day of Issue handstamp. A number of special handstamps, sponsored by stamp dealers and others, will be used on 17 January – full details will be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin*.

Souvenir Cover

A souvenir cover, of similar design to the first day cover, will be available from all philatelic counters from 18 January, price 17p. This can be used to obtain relevant Bird postmarks after the first day of issue and will be on sale for one year.

Earlier Issues

This is the third set of Bird stamps issued by the British Post Office, the first set was issued in August 1966, the second in January 1980. The Barn Owl was featured on the 17p stamp in the Nature Conservation set of May 1986 and the Bewick's Swan on the 31p value of this year's Linnean Society issue.



The Avocet

National Postal Museum News

Three new NPM cards will be issued on 7 November with the theme of "Monarchs' heads" and this will complete the series of portraits of monarchs as used on stamps up to the present day.

Card 88/10 features Stage 3 of J A C Harrison's Downey head die of King George V, 1911; card 88/11 shows a photograph of King George VI by Bertram Park, the source of Dulac's drawn portrait used on definitives and card 88/12 reproduces a photograph of George VI and Queen Elizabeth by Dorothy Wilding, the source of Dulac's drawn portraits used on the 1937 Coronation stamp.



The cards will be available from the Museum shop priced 20p each, sets of three will be available by mail order from the Museum, priced 60p per set plus 19p handing charge for orders up to £18. For mail orders in excess of £18 a handling charge of £1.59 will apply; these orders will be despatched by registered mail.

The previous Monarchs' head cards featuring Edward VII, George V and Edward VIII (issued May 1987) are still available, price 60p per set.

Three cards reproducing artwork for GPO posters in Post Office Archives are available; they feature "Country Postman" and "Postman in the Potteries", both by Jesse Collins, c.1959 and "The Counter Clerk" by J. Ramsey Wherrett, c.1949. These cards are priced 15p each.

Two cards reproducing postmarks of Hemel Hempstead, recently published by the Hemel Hempstead Philatelic Society, are available from the Museum, price 20p each.

All orders should be addressed to: National Postal Museum, King Edward Street, LONDON ECIA ILP.