

Royal Mail News



The Lapwing

Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Stamps

A flock of migrating swans is the last great wildlife spectacle left in Britain.

Sir Peter Scott

Five stamps commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust go on sale at post offices, and philatelic outlets on 12 March. The stamps feature paintings of birds by C F Tunnicliffe, reproduced by permission of the Oriol Gallery.

The **19p** stamp (basic inland 2nd class rate) features the Muscovy Duck (*Cairina moschata*), a native of South America, noted for its musk smell.

The **25p** value (basic inland 1st class & EU rate) shows the Lapwing (*Vánellus vanellus*), also known as the Green Plover or Peewit. It is a graceful bird, found in most parts of the UK. During the winter large numbers arrive from abroad and can be seen by visitors to all eight WWT centres. It is noted for its fine long crest and iridescent plumage. It lives mainly in fields, pastures, marshes and on tidal mudflats. The nest is made in a slight depression in the ground, usually lined by grass or straw. Some three to five eggs are laid in March to July; these vary in colour from plain blue to reddish but are usually olive or buff, heavily blotched in dark brown and sharply pointed at the narrow end. Lapwings feed on wireworms, snails, slugs, insects and larvae.

The White Fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*), the subject of the **30p** denomination (Europe, non-

EU countries rate), is a winter visitor. It differs from the Grey Lag Goose in having black patches or bars on its breast and a white patch at the base of the bill. It lives on moors and marshes, and is more commonly found along the west coast. The nest is constructed from heather, sticks, leaves and grass; four to six eggs are laid in April. The Trust's centre at Slimbridge is host to the largest over-wintering flock of these geese. It was finding these, and the rarer Lesser White-fronted Geese among them, that persuaded Peter Scott to found the WWT at Slimbridge.

The **35p** stamp (worldwide postcard rate) features the Bittern (*Botaurus steallaris*), one of the heron family, and now a rare species in the UK. For 30 years until 1911 it nearly became extinct in the UK. Bitterns are sometimes seen at WWF centres and it is hoped more extensive and managed reedbeds at the Llanelli and Martin Mere centres will attract this bird. The Bittern is noted for its warm buff and brown plumage. It is a shy and secretive bird, which is often hidden in reed beds. If disturbed it points its bill upwards and straightens its neck so as to become invisible amongst the reeds. It feeds on fish, eels, and





...tall, even for a strapping 15 year old, and the pay barely adequate to cover accommodation in the local B & B. I fell in love with the place. On those long summer evenings, with birds all around and the occasional skein of geese silhouetted against the deepening sky, I felt for the first time in my life something like 'the call of the wild'. The fact that people of my age could have stood on that spot time after time over thousands of years and experienced an identical link with the natural world, made a powerful impression on me.

So, too, did one of Sir Peter Scott's principal exhibits at Slimbridge: a large mirror bearing the message, *You are now looking at the most destructive animal in the world.* Some just laughed, but many more (especially if they were with children) readily took the point.

People learn a lot at Slimbridge, even as they have fun. For 120,000 schoolchildren every year, a good recreational experience provides the best possible educational context and, for 50 years now, Slimbridge and the other WWT Centres have provided some of the most stimulating open-air classrooms to be found in the UK. What they have done above all else is to stop people thinking of wetlands as watery wastelands. In fact, wetland, second only to rainforests in terms of the number of species they support.

As so often, Sir Peter was decades ahead of his time. He recognised the enormous value of wetlands, not just in terms of their intrinsic beauty but also in terms of their economic value. It was when we knew so little about the ecology of wetlands. Today it's utterly inexcusable.

Inspired in large part by WWT, which itself employs 35 full-time researchers, a huge number of research programmes are in place in different parts of the world unravelling the mysteries of wetlands and the countless species that depend on them. All this serves to remind us of just how dependent we human beings are on the wetlands for our own wellbeing.

In addition, WWT is directly involved in several captive breeding programmes to rescue species from the brink of extinction. There were just 50 Hawaiian Geese (or Nene) in existence in the early 1950s when three were sent to Slimbridge. From these more than 2000 have been reared, and 200 returned to their native Hawaii to re-establish the population. Recently I was lucky enough to see some of these birds flourishing in the wild in Hawaii; that's when programmes of this kind truly begin to make sense - you can see they really do work.

It's this kind of knowledge and experience that enables campaigning bodies to push for further legislative measures to protect wetlands. Things are steadily improving. Under the international treaty, the Ramsar Convention, more than 740 wetland sites worldwide (totalling in excess of 45 million hectares) have been designated for protected status.



Mrs J Robinson
200 Manorbier Road
Ilkeston
Derbyshire
DE7 4AB

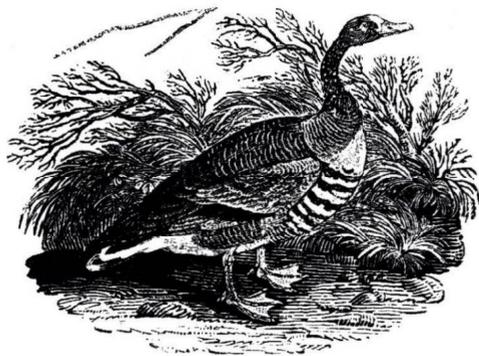
frogs. During the breeding season the males are noted for their deep booming sound which can carry very long distances. The eggs, usually four or five, are laid in March-June and are sandy or olive-brown in colour. The nest is made in dense reed beds and is small considering the size of the bird.



The 41p value (basic airmail letter rate) depicts the Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), a large bird, measuring 5 feet, which over-winters from Iceland in the British Isles. It is to be seen at the WWT centres at Welney, Martin Mere, and Caerlaverock. The natural habitat is mainly salt water lochs and inlets of the sea where it feeds on water weeds and shellfish. It emits a deep ringing call, likened to a bugle. It is similar to the Bewick's Swan which featured on the 31p Linnean Society stamp in 1988.

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

In December 1945 Sir Peter Scott (1909-89) visited Slimbridge on the River Severn near Gloucester. Watching the wildfowl he decided that this was the place in which anyone who loved wild geese must live. Within a year he founded the Wildfowl Trust (now the WWT) at Slimbridge. The Trust now has eight centres, with 1500 hectares of land, attracting over 3/4 million visitors each year. A feature on the work of the Trust will be published in next month's *Bulletin*.



The White-Fronted Wild Goose

Collectors may send their own stamped covers on the day of issue, for these cancels, to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH EH3 5TT, or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, BIRMINGHAM B1 1AA (Slimbridge postmark). The outer envelope should be endorsed "FD9605" (Bureau), or "FD9606" (Slimbridge).

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors who wish to post covers to receive local (mostly non-pictorial) "First Day of Issue" handstamps.

Details of other special handstamps, sponsored by Royal Mail, stamp dealers and others, will be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – the Royal Mail's magazine for postmark collectors. It is available on subscription from the British Philatelic Bureau: £10 UK and Europe; £21.75 Rest of World (Airmail).

Collectors are reminded that it will be in order to affix just the 19p WWT stamp to covers to receive all special cancels ("First Day of Issue", sponsored and philatelic counters), in use on 12 March. The minimum 1st class rule is suspended on this day as this set includes a 2nd class rate stamp. It should be noted that this concession applies only to WWT stamps; covers bearing other stamps must bear at least 1st class postage.

The Designer

The stamps were designed by Moseley Webb using paintings by Charles Frederick Tunnicliffe (1901-79) who devoted his life to studying, drawing and painting the wild birds of Britain. Tunnicliffe was born at Langley, near Macclesfield, son of a shoemaker turned farmer. He was educated at the Macclesfield School of Art and the Royal College of Art. His work included drawings for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and wood engraving

illustrations for Henry Williamson's books *Tarka the Otter* (1927) and *Salar the Salmon* (1935). He published a number of books of his own including *Bird Portraiture* (1945) and *Shorelands Summer Diary* (1952). His wildlife drawings were greatly admired by Sir Peter Scott.

Tunnickliffe designed stamps (local carriage labels) for Lundy (Bristol Channel) in 1964 and 1967; these featured a falcon and a group of puffins.

Technical details

Pinters: Harrison & Sons Ltd
Process: Photogravure
Size: 37 x 35 mm
Sheets: 100
Perforation: 14 x 14.5
Phosphor: 19p – one phosphor band
 Blue fluor in phosphor
 25p-41p phosphor coated
Paper: OBA free (OBA = Optical Brightening Agent)
Gum: PVA

First Day Facilities

Unstamped Royal Mail first day cover envelopes will be available from main post offices, the British Philatelic Bureau and Post Office Counters philatelic outlets around a week before 12 March, price 25p.

The Bureau will provide a first day cover service – collectors may order the Royal Mail cover bearing the stamps, cancelled with a pictorial "First Day of Issue" postmark of the Bureau or Slimbridge, price £2.18 (including VAT) to UK addresses, £1.86 to overseas addresses (no VAT). Orders for first day covers must be received at the Bureau by 12 March 1996.

Presentation Pack and Stamp Cards

A presentation pack (price £1.85) and stamp cards (25p each) will be available from the Bureau, Post Office Counters philatelic outlets, and main post offices.

Souvenir Postcard Book

The third postcard book will be produced – beautifully illustrated with Peter Scott and Tunnickliffe paintings, and containing 10 cards featuring the five designs of the WWT stamps, and five of the birds in natural settings. It will be available from the Bureau and Post Office Counters philatelic outlets, price £2.95. The

cards featuring the stamp designs differ from the stamp cards ("PHQ cards") in reproducing the design without The Queen's head and value; they are ideal for postal use or for mounting in the stamp album with the stamps. Earlier postcard books were produced for the 1995 Cats and Rugby League stamps. The Rugby League book is still available from the Bureau (code PB200, price £2.95).

Earlier Bird Stamps

Birds have featured on numerous British stamps – either as the main, or subsidiary, part of the design, or in symbolic form:

1937 Coronation 1½d (The Ampulla)
 1946 Victory 3d
 1953 Coronation 2½d & 4d (Ampulla)
 1957 Scouts Jamboree 4d
 1961 PO Savings Bank 3d
 1961 CEPT 4d & 10d
 1963 National Nature week 4½d
 1966 Birds
 1977 Christmas 7p & 9p
 1980 Birds
 1981 Folklore 14p
 1982 Darwin 26p
 1982 Textiles 15½p
 1982 Information Technology 15½p
 1982 Christmas 15½p
 1983 Fairs 31p
 1983 Christmas
 1984 College of Arms 16p
 1984 Royal Mail (Swan's Head inn sign)
 1985 Composers 31p & 34p
 1986 Conservation 17p
 1987 Christmas 34p
 1988 Linnean Society 31p
 1988 Edward Lear 19p & 35p
 1989 Birds
 1989 Food & Farming 27p
 1990 RSPCA 34p
 1991 Greetings – 4 stamps
 1992 Wintertime 33p
 1993 Swans
 1993 Greetings – Parrot
 1993 20th Century Art 33p
 1993 Christmas 35p (Turkey)
 1994 Greetings – Rupert stamp
 1994 Pictorial Postcards (seagulls in sky)
 1994 Channel Tunnel (French cock)
 1995 Peace & Freedom 25p UN
 1995 Shakespeare's Globe – Swan
 1995 Christmas

No doubt sharp-eyed readers will find others! Ed.