

Pondlife Beneath the surface of a new issue

FOUR STAMPS featuring Pondlife will be available from post offices, Royal Mail Tallents House Edinburgh, and philatelic outlets from 10 July. The stamps are Royal Mail's contribution to the Europa series issued by member countries of PostEurop; the theme for this year's issues being Water – a Natural Resource.

The stamps feature: 1st class (27p) Common Frog; E (European rate, 37p) Great Diving Beetle; 45p Three-spined Stickleback; and 65p Southern Hawker Dragonfly. The EUROPA symbol, as used since 1994, is positioned at top left on the 1st and E stamps. The Queen's silhouette is printed in silver at top right, with the value or service indicator below in black.

The basic European letter rate will increase 1p to 37p from 2 July.



Technical details

Printer De La Rue

Process Gravure

Stamp size 41 x 30mm

Sheets 100

Perforation 15 x 14

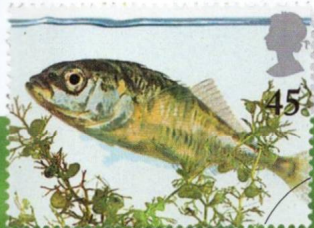
Phosphor Two bands

Gum PVA

Gutter pairs Vertical

The Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*) is found throughout Britain and Ireland in damp vegetation near water, and it is often a visitor to suburban gardens. Famed for its leaping ability, its muscular back legs enable it to leap six to seven times its own body length. The shade and markings of its skin vary from a pale greenish-grey, through bright yellow, to a dark olive-coloured brown, and can be marked by spots, speckling or marbling in black, brown or red. The frog can change its colour by spreading dark pigment cells scattered over its body beneath the outer skin. It becomes paler in light, warm and dry conditions, and darker in cold, damper weather. It feeds on slugs, worms, flies and insects, all of which are found near ponds, and may travel half a mile to reach its spawning site. The frog returns to the same spawning site every year. The jelly-covered spawn of up to 4000 eggs absorbs water and floats on the pond – two or three weeks later, the tadpoles wriggle free of the eggs. Sadly, few survive to adulthood.

The Great Diving Beetle (*Dytiscus marginalis*) can fly long distances from pond to pond, usually at night, and is equally adept underwater when it swims rapidly, its streamlined body propelled by hair-fringed back legs. Fierce carnivores in either adult or larval form, they have large curved jaws for piercing prey such as worms, tadpoles and sticklebacks.



The stamps are designed by John Gibbs, with photographs by Frank Greenaway. Mr Gibbs designed the 1981 Year of the Disabled, 1986 Parliamentary Conference, 1990 Thomas Hardy and Gallantry, 1993 Roman Britain, and 1999 Royal Wedding issues. Natural history photographer Frank Greenaway photographed his subjects in special tanks he keeps for this purpose at his Sussex home. Mr Gibbs then worked on the photographs, adding water foliage on computer as required.

Below, common frogs among Duckweed.



The Three-spined Stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*), found in most well-established ponds, is named for the strong spines in front of its dorsal fin; these become erect when the fish is disturbed. In May the males develop their brilliant breeding colours: the back is bluish, the belly a fiery orange and the eyes an emerald green. The male constructs a tubular nest of pond weeds and other fragments of plant material before chasing a female into the nest, where she lays a few eggs before being chased out again. The male repeats this process with several different females until the nest is full of eggs which he then fertilises. Until the eggs hatch, the male guards the nest, and fans the eggs with his fins – the current of water aerates the eggs and prevents the growth of moulds. The eggs hatch within five to 12 days depending on the water temperature. The baby sticklebacks then stay with their father for a while.

The Southern Hawker Dragonfly (*Aeshna cyanea*) can usually be seen flying in the vicinity of large ponds or canals, keeping well out over the water. A tireless flier, its flight period lasts from the end of May to the end of August. They are voracious hunters, living among weeds and growing gradually, changing their skins as they outgrow them. The 65p stamp shows the female sitting on a water lily bud.

Cylinders and colours

1st, E & 65p 1A black ● 1B greenish yellow ● 1C bright magenta ● 1D new blue ● 1E bluish silver (iridion ink) ● 1F silver

45p 1A black ● 1B greenish yellow ● 1C bright magenta ● 1D new blue ● 1E bluish silver (iridion ink) ● 1F dull silver (tint on fish) ● 1G silver (Queen's head)

Phosphor cylinder number P4 is positioned opposite row 8, above the ink cylinder numbers on all values. The iridion ink is printed below the water-line on all values to give a purl-lescent effect. This was also used on the Occasions issue in February.



Pondlife first day cover (£2.45 UK, £2.09 overseas) above, and presentation pack (£2.10) right. The pack contains the four stamps.

FIRST DAY FACILITIES Unstamped Royal Mail FDC envelopes will be available from main post offices and philatelic outlets about a week before 10 July, price 25p. Orders for serviced FDCs with the four stamps or cancelled by a pictorial first day postmark of Royal Mail Tallents House Edinburgh or Oundle, Peterborough must reach Tallents House (address below) by the day of issue. Price £2.45 UK (including VAT) or £2.09 overseas (no VAT). Oundle was chosen for the alternative postmark as it is the closest location to the National Dragonfly Centre.

Collectors may send stamped covers on the day of issue to: Royal Mail, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB (Tallents House postmark), or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, St Stephen's Street, Birmingham B6 4AA (Oundle postmark), marking the outer envelope 'FD0115' (Tallents House), or 'FD0116' (Oundle). Covers can be posted or handed in at main post offices for the Oundle postmark. Details of other handstamps for 10 July will be announced in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – available on subscription from Tallents House (£10 UK/Europe; £21.75 elsewhere). For a sample copy write to: The Editor, British Postmark Bulletin, Royal Mail, 2-14 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8HQ.

PHILATELIC PRODUCTS A well-illustrated pack (price £2.10) and stamp cards (25p each) will be available from main post offices and philatelic outlets. The pack, designed by John Gibbs, features text by Philippa Kerr, with illustrations by Andrew Davidson/The Artworks. A Postbag – a pack for young collectors – will be available from Tallents House and philatelic outlets, price £5.99. This will contain the four stamps, temporary tattoos, a 'food chain game', Pondlife poster, postcards, and other goodies •