

Birds of Prey Two of Britain's most beautiful



Technical details

Printer Walsall Security Printers

Process Lithography

Size 37 x 35mm

Sheets 60

Perforation 14.5

Phosphor Phosphor background, surrounding images

Gum PVA

Gutter pairs Horizontal

Plate numbers and colours

W1 brownish grey ● W1 black
 ● W1 greenish yellow ● W1 magenta
 ● W1 new blue ● W1 phosphor

THE FIRST of the special issues for 2003 features the Barn Owl and the Kestrel. The 10 stamps – all at 1st class rate – go on sale at Post Office branches, Tallents House and Post Office philatelic outlets on 14 January. The stamps are printed in se-tenant blocks of 10: the top row of five stamps shows a progression of the Barn Owl in flight; a similar sequence of the Kestrel graces the second row of stamps. The Barn Owl is depicted against a black background, indicative of its nocturnal nature. The Queen's head and service indicator are printed at top right, with the captions 'Barn Owl *Tyto alba*' and 'Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*' at bottom left. They were designed by John Gibbs using photography by Stephen Dalton/NHPA.

FIRST DAY FACILITIES Unstamped Royal Mail FDC envelopes will be available from main Post Office branches and philatelic outlets about a week before 14 January, price 25p. Orders for FDCs with the stamps cancelled by a pictorial first day postmark of Tallents House Edinburgh or Hawkshead, Ambleside must reach Tallents House by the date of issue. Price £3.59 UK (including VAT) or £3.06 overseas (no VAT).

Collectors may send stamped covers on the day of issue to: Royal Mail Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB, or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, South Shields DO, Keppell Street, South Shields NE33 1AA (Hawkshead postmark), marking the outer envelope 'FD0301' or 'FD0302'. Covers can be posted or handed in at main Post Office branches for the Hawkshead postmark. Details of sponsored handstamps will be announced in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – available on subscription from Tallents House. For a sample copy write to: The Editor, British Postmark Bulletin, Royal Mail, 148 Old Street, London EC1V 9HQ.

and rare birds grace Royal Mail's new issue



Owls and kestrels are widespread throughout the UK. Barn owl numbers have declined by over 50% from the 1930s but appear to have stabilized at around 4000 breeding pairs. The kestrel population was estimated at 51,500 pairs a decade ago but there has been a general decline in recent times, most marked in lowland England and Wales. This is probably due to the sort of causes seen with the barn owl – shortages of prey due to changes in farming methods.

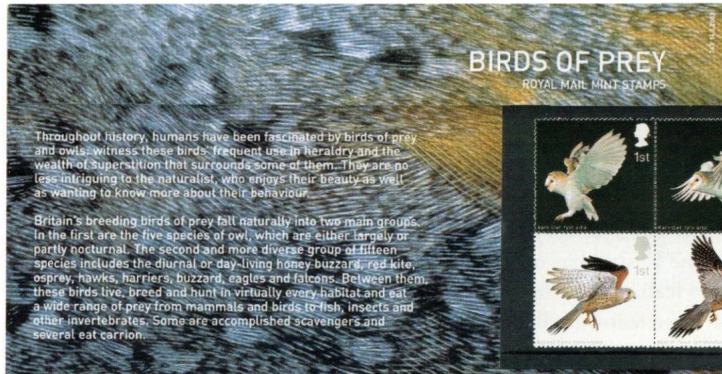


A well-illustrated presentation pack (below) containing the 10 stamps (price £3.05) and stamp cards (25p each) will be available from main Post Offices and philatelic outlets.

Note: postmarks will be applied in silver ink.

BIRDS OF PREY
ROYAL MAIL FIRST DAY COVER

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BIRDS OF PREY
ROYAL MAIL MINT STAMPS

Throughout history, humans have been fascinated by birds of prey and owls. Witness these birds' frequent use in heraldry and the wealth of superstition that surrounds some of them. They are no less intriguing to the naturalist, who enjoys their beauty as well as wanting to know more about their behaviour.

Britain's breeding birds of prey fall naturally into two main groups. In the first are the five species of owl, which are either largely or partly nocturnal. The second and more diverse group of fifteen species includes the diurnal or day-living honey buzzard, red kite, osprey, hawks, harriers, buzzard, eagles and falcons. Between them, these birds live, breed and hunt in virtually every habitat and eat a wide range of prey from mammals and birds to fish, insects and other invertebrates. Some are accomplished scavengers and several eat carrion.

This information is taken from the presentation pack, written by Mike Everett of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Birds of prey Humans are fascinated by birds of prey and owls. These birds appear frequently in heraldic devices and a wealth of superstition surrounds them. Naturalists enjoy their beauty and studying their behaviour.

There are the five species of owl, which are either largely or partly nocturnal, and 15 other birds of prey including the diurnal or day-living honey buzzard, red kite, osprey, hawks, harriers, buzzard, eagles and falcons. They live, breed and hunt in virtually every habitat and eat a wide range of prey – mammals, birds, fish, insects and other invertebrates. Some are accomplished scavengers and several eat carrion.

The barn owl is easily identified by its white, heart-shaped face with black eyes, white underparts and sandy grey and white upperparts. Its most common call is an unearthly shriek; it also makes assorted hissing and snoring sounds. Barn owls frequent open lowlands, but are generally found on farmland. Hunting is often from a perch such as a fencepost or stone wall but more commonly is carried out on the wing. Undigested hard parts of the prey are disgorged as black, sausage-shaped pellets which accumulate in large numbers at roosting and nesting sites. The barn owls nest in barns, outhouses, ruins, and holes in trees. Up to seven eggs are laid, incubation (by the female alone) is for 30-31 days and the young fly at 50-55 days.

The Kestrel is a small falcon, easily the UK's most widespread bird of prey, readily identified by its habit of persistent hovering – the only small bird of prey to do this. Males have grey heads and black-tipped grey tails and chestnut backs; females are browner overall with heavily barred darker upperparts. Kestrels are fairly silent birds; their regular call is a high-pitched 'kee-kee-kee-kee'. Kestrels are in fact found in all sorts of open country, even in built-up areas including large cities where they are to be seen along roadsides and motorways.

Kestrels hunt by watching and pouncing from telegraph poles or tree branches, or whilst in flight with characteristic bouts of hovering. Mice and voles, small birds, beetles and insects are their main diet. Undigested material is ejected via the mouth as small, elongated pellets.

Nests may be situated on ledges of cliffs and buildings or in almost any sort of hole or crevice. Up to six eggs are laid and are creamy or buffish brown in colour with dark spots or blotches. After being incubated for around 28 days, the young fly at 27-32 days.

Owls and Kestrels on stamps An owl, of sorts, featured on the 3d Post Office Savings Bank stamp of 1961, but more realistic representations of a Barn Owl are found on the 17p stamp in the 1986 Nature Conservation set and 19p stamp of the Above and Beyond Millennium set January 2000. The latter was voted the favourite stamp of the year. Edward Lear's famous 'Owl and the Pussy Cat' were depicted on the 19p stamp in the Lear centenary set of 1988. The Barn Owl featured on the front cover of 6s stamp books dated January and February 1969.

The Kestrel has not previously been shown on British stamps although does feature, with the Barn Owl, on the Birds of Prey aerogramme – one of seven featuring British Birds issued in July and August 1994 •

