

Birds of Prey on Indian Stamps: – A tale of philatelic error's!

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The hobby of postal stamp collecting is popularly known as Philately. The author has been an avid birder and philatelist and holds a special interest in collecting postal stamps on the theme 'Birds of Prey - seen in India.' The theme is to collect raptor or bird of prey stamps issued by various countries of the world but only of such species which are seen in India.

For the Raptor Special issue of Flamingo, Gujarat the author wanted to contribute this note for all raptor enthusiasts on the four commemorative stamps which have been issued by the postal department of India till date. These stamps were officially released for public use on 30th December 1992 and below are the images from the authors' personal stamp collection.

Interestingly all the above four species of Birds of prey have been recorded in Gujarat state. One of the species is a resident, while the other three are migratory. The Osprey is a common winter visitor to the state with widespread distribution. The Shaheen (Indian Peregrine) is an uncommon to rare resident in some hilly parts of the Gujarat state. There have been vagrant records of the other two species Bearded Vulture which was recorded from Saurashtra and of the Golden

Eagle which has isolated records from North Gujarat and Kachchh areas (Ganpule et al. 2022).



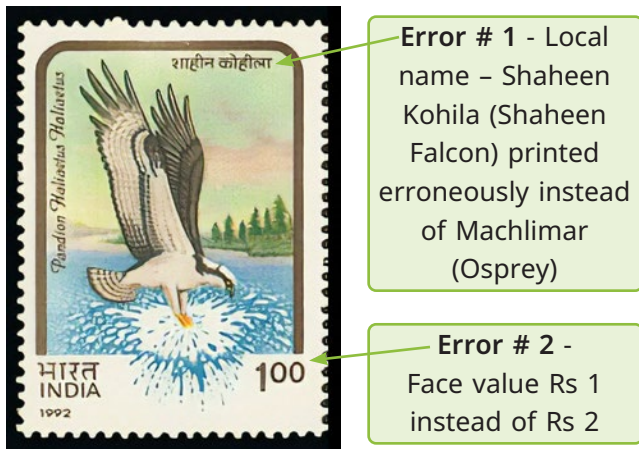
Figure 2: Image of a First Day Cover with a special Raptor pictorial cancellation issued by the Coimbatore General Post Office on 30th December 1992 (Day of release)

A tale of philatelic errors!

In Philately any stamp which is scarce is of high importance for collectors. The reason behind such scarcity can be due to some special factors or reasons. Collectors highly seek after such stamps and there is always a huge demand, leading to a very high price of such rarities. Interestingly two of such modern-day rarities have emerged from the set of the above Birds of Prey stamps issue of Dec 1992.



Figure 1: Image of birds of prey on the postal stamps - Osprey Pandion Haliaeetus Haliaeetus (Face Value: Rs 2); Shaheen Falcon Falco Peregrinus Peregrinator (Face Value: Rs 6); Lammergeier Gypaetus Barbatus Aureus (Face Value: Rs 8); Golden Eagle Aquila Chryseatos Dephanea (Face Value: Rs 11).



1. Error Stamp



2. Official Release Stamp

Figure 3: Osprey stamp with printing & face value error

The story behind these error stamps and their value to philatelists: It was learned that the postal department had initially decided to issue the Osprey stamp with a Face value of Rs 1, however during the printing period there was a policy change to revise the minimum stamp rate for commemorative stamps to Rs 2 and hence the replacement orders were issued for a Rs 2 Face value stamp.

One more issue which the Osprey and the Peregrine (Shaheen) stamps was a printing error so, to say an ornithological blunder. On the Rs 1 Face value stamp of the Osprey and the Rs 6 Face value stamp of the Indian Peregrine (Shaheen), the local Hindi names were mixed up and instead of mentioning "Machlimar" on the Osprey stamp, it was erroneously mentioned as "Shahin Kohila"



1. Error Stamp



2. Official Release Stamp

Figure 4: Shaheen stamp with printing error

and similar name jumbling happened on the Peregrine (Shaheen) Stamp.

It is believed that despite the best precautions taken by the postal department in ensuring that these error stamps are destroyed and not released, there have been a few copies that probably got released due to oversight an ended up getting released to public by mistake. Hence these stamps became a case of a classic error in modern Indian philately and now are highly fancied by collectors.

While there is no official count of such error stamps in existence, but it is believed that around 12 to 15 genuine copies of the Osprey and 2 copies of the Peregrine (Shaheen) stamps are known to collectors. These are unused mint copies which were never used commercially. Being highly

sought after a genuine expert certified copy of this Osprey stamp was last auctioned at the Spink Auction held on 18th Nov 2022 for 3,000 British pounds + bidders premium (3 Lakhs + Indian rupees). A similar realization was expected on a certified Peregrine (Shaheen) Stamp which came up for auction (Lot # 106) in May 2016 under the Christoph Gartner GmbH & CO KG auction. The Only Known do date a Strip of 3 stamps of Osprey variety was sold for a whopping sum of 15000 pounds + Premium (15 lakhs + Indian rupees) in 25th November 2014 Spink sale.



Figure 5: The Strip of 3 Known do date with the error

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References

Ganpule P., Varu M., Trivedi B., & Raina A. D., 2022. A field Guide to Birds of Gujarat. Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat. Ahmedabad. i-viii, 1-488.

Link to the image source (Fig 1) and the Spink auction (Osprey stamp). <https://www.spink.com/lot/22026000299> (18th November 2022).

Link to the reference & image source (Fig 3) of Christoph Gartner GmbH & CO KG auction (Shaheen Stamp) <https://www.stampcircuit.com/stamp-Auction/auktionshaus-christoph-g%C3%A4rtner-gmbh-co-kg/6883379/lot-106-indien-auktionshaus> (30th May 2016)

Fig 5 - Osprey Variety the only known strip of 3 sold at M/s Spink, UK during November 2014, <https://www.spink.com/lot/14025000711>