

The Unissued Philatelic Essays of Morocco, Featuring Herpetofaunal Species

Indraneil Das

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak

MALAYSIA

idas@ibec.unimas.my

Morocco, in northern Africa, has had a turbulent recent political history, with several colonial powers struggling to acquire the country—France, Spain, Great Britain and Germany. Although the Kingdom of Morocco was established in 1956, the first stamps for the region were issued between 1956 and 1957 (separately by the northern and southern zones), and issues for the entire country commenced from 1958. Historically, both France and Spain have influenced its philatelic production. Overprinted Gibraltar stamps were used at British postal agencies tasked with postal delivery in Morocco, between 1898 and 1903. Thereafter, stamps of Great Britain, surcharged with British, Spanish and French currencies, were used till the time of Morocco’s independence. A brief philatelic history of the country can be found in Lamb (2014).

Morocco is one of few countries or postal authorities worldwide not to have issued definitive or commemorative stamps on herpetological themes (Domfil, 1992), although stamps, especially private post issues, are in high demand (Brunström, 2014).

Thus, it was a surprise when a French dealer could provide me with a set of stamp essays from this country, depicting three species of herpetofauna, from a series of 10 species depicting mostly African species of mammals and reptiles (Table 1). This includes the now locally extinct north African crocodile (*Crocodylus suchus*), the Mediterranean tortoise (*Testudo graeca*) and

the exotic (to North Africa) rhinoceros viper (*Bitis nasicornis*). All (except apparently one, the giraffe, *Giraffa camelopardalis*) were prepared with alternative color frames, and of the same value, suggestive of early designs (= philatelic essays; *sensu* Mackay, 2003) for approval. Not much is known of the date of issue or designer, except that they date to the year 1956 and are printed on ivory cream paper type. The crocodile proofs are of 3 franc denominations, and set in frames of gray, green and brown, and printed on map litho paper stock, each measuring 132 × 100 mm, each of the stamps of dimensions 48 × 27 mm. The higher value tortoise proofs are in denomination of 20 franc (fr), and set in frames of gray and green, and in similar size and type of mount. The highest values in the series are the snake stamp designs, of 45 fr value.

Other taxa in the series include the extinct (since before 1500) giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) (2 fr, set in brown frame), the Barbary stag (*Cervus elaphus barbarus*), an antelope (15 fr, set in gray frame) and an exotic species, the hamadryas baboon (*Papio hamadryas*) (5 fr, set in gray frame).

The design of the set is worthy of description. Format is either horizontal (eight designs) or vertical (two designs). The frames measure 8 × 5 mm, the space for the images 28 × 18 mm. On the top are the words “MAROC POSTES” (= Morocco Post, in French). On the left of the frame is the proposed value in

Table 1. Essays for an unissued series of thematic stamps from Morocco, featuring mostly African fauna.

Sl	Proposed face value (in francs)	Species depicted	Frame color / format	Remarks
1	2 fr	Giraffe, <i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	brown / horizontal	Extinct in Morocco
2	3 fr	North African crocodile, <i>Crocodylus suchus</i>	brown, green and gray / horizontal	Extinct in Morocco
3	5 fr	Hamadryas baboon, <i>Papio hamadryas</i>	brown, green and gray / horizontal	Exotic to Morocco
4	10 fr	Barbary sheep, <i>Ammotragus lervia</i>	brown, green and gray / horizontal	Mountains of Morocco
5	15 fr	Barbary stag, <i>Cervus elaphus barbarus</i>	gray / horizontal	Extinct in Morocco
6	20 fr	North African tortoise, <i>Testudo graeca</i>	brown, green and gray / horizontal	Widespread in Morocco
7	25 fr	Bactrian camel, <i>Camelus bactrianus</i>	brown, green and gray / horizontal	Exotic to Morocco
8	30 fr	Sand cat, <i>Felis margarita</i>	brown, green and gray / vertical	Western Morocco
9	40 fr	Tibetan fox, <i>Vulpes ferrilata</i>	brown, green and gray / horizontal	Exotic to Morocco
10	45 fr	Rhinoceros viper, <i>Bitis nasicornis</i>	brown, green and red / vertical	Exotic to Morocco