

# Biodiversity of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in fantasy coinage

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Fantasy coins are produced by enterprising individuals and companies, chiefly targetting collectors, rather than to defraud citizens, and considerable literature now exists on the topic (see listing in Cuhaj and Thomas, 2011; Cuhaj, 2012). Geographical entities linked to such products are sometimes curious and include coins purported to be from areas that are within legitimate political entities (such as Easter Island, Galapagos and Greenland), as (sometimes humorous) declaration of independence (including Republic of Texas, Hawaii Islands and Transdnieria), “online nations” or those entirely imaginary (including Atlantis and Lundy), or those that do not have human inhabitants (Antarctica, and even the Moon and Mars) or currencies for role-playing games and others (such as the board game, Monopoly™). A specialist collectors group (The Unrecognised States Numismatic Society), based in California, USA, exists to encourage such hobbyists, which describes itself as “specialising in the study of coins, medallic pieces, banknotes and related numismatic, pseudonumismatic and exonumismatic material issued by unrecognised states, alternative governments, rebel and secessionist groups, political associations, alternative currency promoters, chivalric orders, new country projects, micronations and related entities, commercial organisations, artists, writers, film makers, royal pretenders and exiles, fantasists and utopian visionaries” (<http://www.usns.info>).

The Andaman and Nicobar islands, an archipelago of some 200 islands in the eastern Bay of Bengal, are part of Republic of India, and use currency issued by the Government of India. The only unique coinage of these islands are tokens issued by the Indian Government under British administration, in 1861 (value, 1 Rupee, KM [the standard coin cataloging Krause and Mishler numbering system] #Tn1, 1a–1c; Tn2), and withdrawn from circulation in 1870 (Cuhaj, 2012). Presumably, these tokens were used in the penal colony established at Port Blair, in the Andaman Islands.

A series of eight coins with the words “Andaman and Nicobar Islands”, dated 2011 has been produced by the Osborne Coinage Company, the oldest private mint in the US, based in Cincinnati, Ohio (Table 1; Fig. 1). Their website attribute the designs to Joseph E. Lang (“JL” is visible on the reverse of each of these coins), and feature local biodiversity. Metals used for producing the coins in the series include exclusively copper (25 and 50 paise denominations), copper-nickel (1 and 2 rupees denominations), brass (5 rupees), bimetallic copper-nickel ring with brass centre (10 rupees denomination) and bimetallic copper ring with brass centre (20 rupees denomination). According to the company, 10,000 sets were minted, and these sell at online collectible sites (such as Delcampe and Ebay) for US\$ 11.99–29.99 (equivalent to Indian Rupees, INR 767–1,919 at the exchange rate in early August 2015, or about 300–750% greater than the total face value [INR 38.75] of these coins).

The reverse of each of the coin shows an animal species occurring on these islands, and their values in four languages generally spoken on these islands (Bengali, Hindi, English and Tamil, in sequence in all coins, except in the 50 paise (p) coin, which is Bengali, English, Tamil and Hindi). The obverse shows a fictitious coat of arms of the islands (comprising a palm tree, Arecaceae, in the centre of escutcheon that is supported by two griffons, and surmounted by two banners and the Ashoka Chakra, and a scroll bearing the text “Andaman Islands Nicobar”, in upper case, below the shield). The edges are plain or reeded, and in the highest value (INR 20), both plain and reeded. The low value coins from the series are of single metal, the high value ones (INR 10 and 20) bimetallic, featuring a dugong and a nautilus, respectively. One of the coins show a recently-described species, the Nicobar Gliding Gecko, *Ptychozoon nicobarensis* Das and Vijayakumar, 2009, described by the author of this note and a colleague. All species depicted on these coins are native to these islands.