

HERPETOLOGICAL MATERIAL IN PHILATELY ISSUED FROM MALAYSIA

Indraneil Das¹

Submitted October 7, 2013.

Philatelic and other postal products on herpetological themes from Malaysia are inventoried. These include postage stamps, cancellation marks, stamp booklets, folders, annual stamp albums and aerogram. North Borneo and Labuan, both British colonies that eventually became part of the Federation of Malaysia, can be credited with producing the world's first stamps showing a recognizable species of reptiles (*Crocodylus porosus*), in the year 1894, under what is now referred to as the first pictorial definitive series. The independent state of Sarawak, during its time under the British sovereign, too produced a turtle stamp (depicting *Chelonia mydas*). Modern issues of Malaysia, under Pos Malaysia's stamp issuing program, continue (since 1972) to issue stamps on a variety of topics, and has, over the years, produced a number of stamps and other postal products, featuring turtles, snakes, lizards and crocodiles that occur in the country.

Keywords: Malaysia; philately; stamps; cancellations; amphibians; reptiles.

INTRODUCTION

Postage stamps have been issued to draw attention to a variety of issues, ranging from national integration, public health (including disease prevention), nature, national or global commemorative events, etc. Within the context of biodiversity or snake-bite treatment, herpetological themes too have appeared on postage stamps of the world (MacDonald, 1973; Balazs et al., 1990; de la Mar, 2000; Böhme, 2007; Anon, 1987; Winchester, 2012). Symbolic elements are also evident, such as the Staff of Aesculapius, the universal medical symbol (Rings, 2005). Conservation and public education is increasingly important for many postal authorities worldwide, as judged from the substantial issues on these themes (Gomez and Balazs, 1983; Balazs et al., 1990). General inventories of herpetological stamps are available in topical stamp catalogs (e.g., Thompson, 1959; Bearn et al., 1977; Domfil, 1992), without scholarly discussion.

Malaysia, a Federation of several political units forming states and territories on mainland Southeast Asia and on northern Borneo, has an active stamp release program, and a member of the Universal Postal Union (since 17 January 1958). Stamps have been used or issued by various states that subsequently became part of the

Federation since 1854, when the East India Company Administration at Malacca used Indian stamps, with a special cancellation (Anon, 2010: 27). Nathan (2008) wrote an engaging article on philatelic releases of the recent years, drawing a parallel with the development of the country.

The currency of the country (since August 1975) has been the Malaysian Ringgit (currency code: MYR), and face value of low value stamps is indicated in cents up to the philatelic issue of 29 November 1996, and from December 2, 1992, was indicated in the vernacular "sen." Face value of high value stamps were indicated with a dollar (\$) sign up to December 21, 1992, and since December 7, 1993, it has been replaced with "RM" (= Ringgit Malaysian).

In this essay, I inventory stamps and other postal products in herpetology issued by Pos Malaysia (www.pos.com.my), the national postal authority of Malaysia. Within a Malaysian context, I also discuss sub-topics covered and the role stamps can play in public education, from making lay people aware of public health, national heritage, biodiversity and nature conservation. Excluded from discussion is the topic of ethnobiology, and consequently, stamps that feature herpetological motifs, symbols or represent stylized species of herpetofauna that are unrecognizable to species, are unlisted.

This essay provides an inventory of postal/philatelic products from Malaysia, and British Crown colonies that eventually became its part. Included are stamps, stamp

¹ Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation Universiti Malaysia Sarawak 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia; e-mail: idas@ibec.unimas.my