

WHY I COLLECT 'BUGS' ON STAMPS - By Alan J. Hanks

When I was very, very young, more years past than I care to remember, my mother was always carping at me for bringing assorted wildlife into the house. Anything that crawled or wiggled and was relatively small seemed to be fair game, but she did not appreciate worms wriggling their way across the kitchen floor. Of course, I could not catch any flying creatures, but mother informed me that I would crow with delight whenever I saw a butterfly. I guess a future die was cast!

Stamp collecting was also a fairly young enthusiasm, as my mother collected and I suppose I was fascinated with all those little bits of coloured paper. Another future die was cast and as the years passed, collecting of butterflies and stamps became a pastime that gave me a lot of pleasure. High School and Secondary School stole some of my available time and then finding a job became important, and both hobbies languished. Then came Military Service, another job, emigration to Canada, shortly followed by marriage and two children.

We moved into a house after a while and since the ground behind us was old farming land, there were plenty of butterflies to be seen and finding the Toronto Entomologists Association gave me some like-minded friends to meet with occasionally. Stamp collecting had also started up again and one day as I was walking down Yonge Street in Toronto, I stopped at the window of a stamp store looking at a lovely set of butterflies from Poland. Needless to say, I was lost and that collection took precedence over my country collections and I found and joined the ATA and the Biology Unit.

Attendance at the annual ATA shows brought me and my wife into contact with many other collectors of thematic stamps and I started looking at the exhibits, thinking to myself "I could do that". I look sometimes at that first exhibit and ponder on how far thematic exhibiting has come, with valuable work from such collectors as Mary Ann Owens and George Guzzio, who were always ready with advice and gentle criticism. Trying to improve an exhibit led me into all sorts of byways; for instance, the collection of serious books on Entomology, which was necessary to improve my knowledge and write-up in the exhibits. I suppose this is not too difficult for collectors who have history, geography and other classic subjects to exhibit, as finding peripheral material with explorers, historians and the like might be relatively easy. However, the peripheral material for natural history subjects is not so easily come by, as there are few stamps showing entomologists or scientists working in allied fields. Adding diseases such as Malaria to my insect exhibit introduced a field that was a little easier to find material for, as plenty of stamps have been issued for Malaria eradication and education and there are a number of other diseases that have quite a lot of philatelic material available.

Serving as the editor of *Biophilately* has been a very enjoyable aspect of my philatelic endeavours and has led to friendships with other collectors of my subject, such as Don Wright, Charles Covell, Vincent Lucas and Greg Herbert, some of whom have also produced exhibits.

I guess it would be safe to say that the alliance of 'bugs' and philately was a chance occurrence in seeing butterfly stamps in a store window, but I like to think that I would have stumbled on marrying the two subjects sooner or later. I can thoroughly recommend trying an exhibit of the subject that you collect, as it leads to many hours of enjoyment, not only in assembling the exhibit but in discussing its merits (or faults) with other exhibitors. NTSS 2009 is in Dayton and it would be great to see exhibits from some more Biology Unit members.

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