

STAMPS LACK ANIMAL DIVERSITY

[*Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from the 25 March 2013 edition of Linn's Stamp News.*]

Brazilian biologists Andre Nemesio and two colleagues have analyzed the animals pictured on stamps, according to a guest blog by Laura Jane Martin on the website of the *Scientific American*.

The blog was posted Feb. 20.

Martin reported that after examining stamps offered on the Delcampe and eBay auction sites, Nemesio discovered that 60 percent of them show birds or mammals, although the vast majority of the world's 8.7 million known species are neither of those.

Nemesio said, "If someone studied the diversity of life through stamps, he or she would reach the conclusion that birds and mammals are the dominant species on earth, that elephants are perhaps the most abundant creatures on this planet, and that insects are a small fraction of nature, mainly represented by butterflies."

He stressed the role that stamps could play in educating people about the diversity of animal life, especially the "hundreds of thousands" of beneficial insects. Nemesio added that images, not numbers, will attract attention.

My comment on this study is that it was far from a scientific investigation of the issue. Searches of on-line auction sites would typically yield filtered results since sellers tend to offer primarily items that have a greater chance of selling than those that do not. One only needs to look at the collecting interests of our own Unit members to see that a large percentage concentrate on birds and mammals. Marketing experts and retail sellers are not fools. They design and offer wares to appeal to the most dominant consumers.

One would expect that species selected for stamp designs would be attractive, cuddly, or notable for some other striking reason. For example, it should not be surprising that butterflies disproportionately represent the insect world as they are very colorful and eye-catching, not lackluster, ugly, or scary like many other insects. There are at least ten times as many moth species as butterfly species, but since most moths are dull and tiny, you will less often see them depicted on a stamp.