

IS THERE REALLY A FLYING FROG?

Dr. Vic Eichler, BU1850

Well, yes and no. One characteristic of frogs is a webbing between the toes, and *Rhacophorus nigropalmatus*, also known as Wallace's Flying Frog, is an aerial acrobat. The webbing between the elongated toes of all four feet is extreme, and with additional lateral webbing extending along the sides of the body between the forelegs and hind legs, this amphibian species can glide great distances from tree to ground.

The ability to glide allows escape from predators that might otherwise make a meal of these tree-living frogs.

First described by the famous British Naturalist Alfred Wallace, a contemporary supporter of the evolution theory with Charles Darwin, this frog that bears his name is not capable of true flight. There are more than 80 species in the genus *Rhacophorus*, living in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Madagascar, as well parts of India and Japan.

This label is from Karakalpakstan, a region of the former Soviet Union that is now located in Uzbekistan as an autonomous republic. The word on the stamp translates as Karakalpakia, which refers to the ethnic group of Turkic people who make Karakalpakstan their home. The image on this stamp shows well the extensive surface area of stretched webbing between the toes of this frog that allows it to glide from a tree to another tree or ground some distance away.

[Ed. note: Unscrupulous individuals in Europe produced local labels such as this Karakalpakstan example for many Russian autonomous areas after the breakup of the Soviet Union. They are not recognized as official emissions and have no postal validity.]



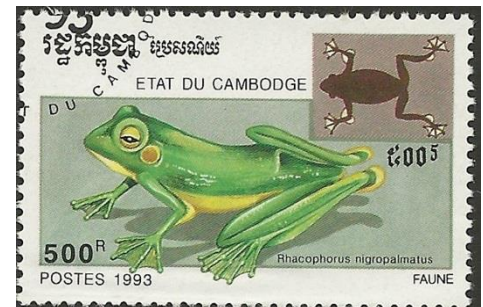
Rhacophorus nigropalmatus
Karakalpakia local



Rhacophorus nigropalmatus
Chad, not yet catalogued

Another interesting feature of these frogs, highly adapted to life in trees, the eggs are not laid in water, but in foam nests created by the adults and positioned in branches overhanging a river or pond. Upon hatching from the eggs, the young larvae drop from the nest to the water below, thus completing their development in the water.

This 1993 Cambodian issue (Sc#1276) shows extended flaps not only between the toes of this frog, but also at the elbows and heels in the graphic representation of the frog in the upper right-hand corner.

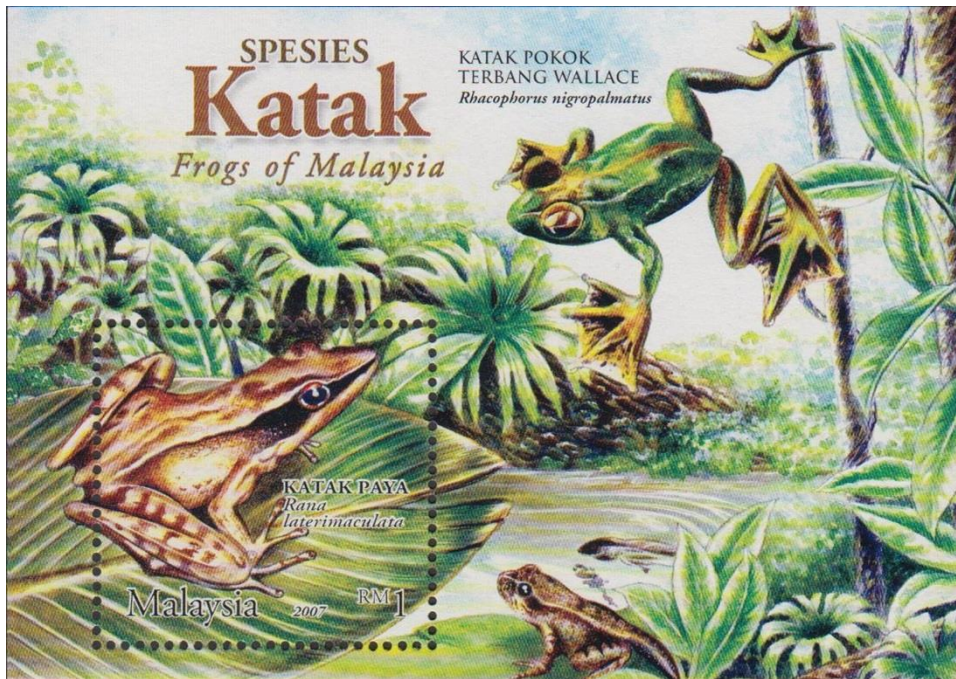


Rhacophorus nigropalmatus
Cambodia, Sc#1276



A 2011 souvenir sheet from Togo has placed the image of a *R. nigropalmatus* in the upper right-hand selva.

Rhacophorus nigropalmatus
Togo, Mi#3878



Rhacophorus nigropalmatus
Malaysia, Sc#1152

The gliding frog on the selva of a 2007 souvenir sheet from Malaysia is identified as the Wallace's Flying Frog:

In all of the illustrations presented here, the artists focused on the webbing between the toes without also indicating the webbing that exists between the outstretched legs on each side of the frog's body.

Other species in this genus that have appeared on postage stamps include *R. prasinatus* (= *smaragdinus*), the Emerald Green Tree Frog (Cambodia, Taiwan, and China), and *R. pardalis*, the Harlequin Tree Frog (Congo and Philippines).