

## PARADISE BUTTERFLIES

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Butterflies are some of the most extraordinarily colorful creatures on Earth (Figure 1). Most butterfly species occur in warmer environments, especially in the tropical rainforests of Asia, Africa and South America. Tropical butterflies are distinguished by a huge variety of colors, shapes and sizes of wings. Like all that is created by nature, their beauty is absolutely harmonious, despite the brightness and diversity.



Figure 1 – Letter from Germany military post 1871 illustrated with a butterfly.

Among the various species of butterflies there are several species of paradise butterflies. In religion, Paradise is a place of exceptional happiness and delight. In paradise there is only peace, prosperity, and happiness. Paradise is a

place of contentment, a land of luxury and fulfillment. In the ancient legend, Paradise is described as a vast beautiful garden filled with wondrous trees, fragrant flowers, wonderfully singing birds and fluttering butterflies (Figure 2).



Figure 3– Stamp of the Netherlands New Guinea 1960 with butterfly the Paradise Birdwing.

The birdwing swallowtails from tropical Asia are some of the largest, most spectacular, and most endangered butterflies in the world. All show high levels of sexual dimorphism (i.e., males and females are different in size and color). Female birdwings are larger and much duller in color than the males, which come in glowingly iridescent colors of brilliant sapphire, emerald, and topaz. Even among the most beautiful butterflies in the world, the Paradise Birdwing stands out for its impressive appearance (Figure 3). This butterfly was named as the Paradise Butterfly for its magical, paradise beauty.

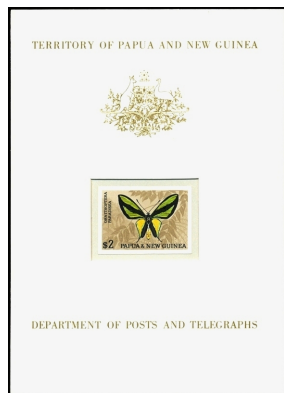


Figure 5 – Proof of Papua New Guinea 1966 with male *Troides papadisea*

1893 by German entomologist Otto Staudinger (Figure 6). The

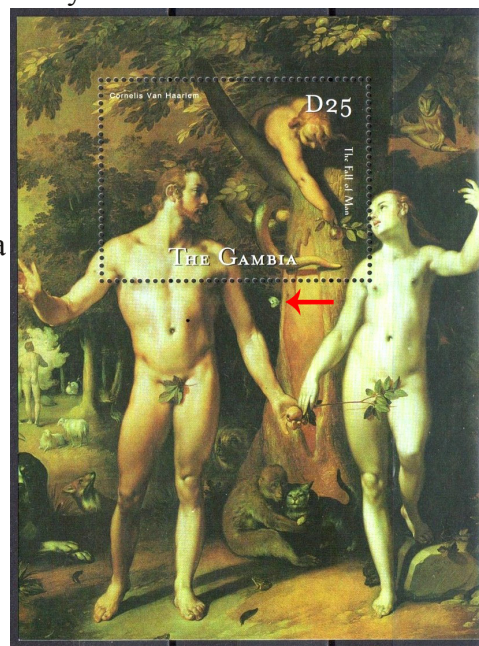


Figure 2 – Souvenir sheet of the Gambia 2001 with painting depicting Paradise and butterfly.



Figure 4 – Stamp of Papua New Guinea 2002 with female *Troides paradisea*

The Paradise Birdwing was first discovered in the 1890s in New Guinea. While the female Paradise Birdwing (Figure 4) looks much like females of other birdwing species, the male (Figure 5), with its dwarfed and unusually shaped hindwings, is very distinctive. As a result, this species is highly prized and protected by law. The first description of this butterfly was in



specific epithet *paradisea*, is the Persian word for paradise.

The butterfly *Troides paradisea* is widely distributed on the mainland of New Guinea and on other islands in the neighbourhood. *Troides paradisea* occurs in mature secondary and primary forest in hilly areas, where it frequents clearings, valleys, gullies and gorges and also flies on slopes and ridges. It is normally found at altitudes between 200 and 800 m but there are records of occasional butterflies being found much higher, even once at 2000 m. Adults appear to be fairly localised in their movements and do not move long distances. They use valleys and gorges as flyways, and collect nectar frequently on various

flowers. They probably live about three months.

The magnificent butterfly with scientific name *Troides paradisea* is variously known as the Paradise Birdwing or Butterfly of Paradise. The male is painted velvety black and shining yellow-green colors, and have wingspan of 100-130 mm. But the most amazing thing in his appearance is the shape of the hind wings, which no one butterfly has: they are decorated with thin delicately curved tails and are so smaller than the front ones that it seems as if they belong to another butterfly.

I would like to point out a pair of varieties of the \$2 stamp of Papua New Guinea 1966, which depicts butterfly *Troides paradisea*. Plate I (Figure 7, 7a). In the lower left of the butterfly there are two short lines from the edge to the yellow part. In the lower part of upper right wing there is a series of indeterminate short lines and dots. Drawing of the compound eyes without connection to the thorax.

Plate II (Figure 8, 8a). The two lines at lower left are lacking. There are clear fine lines of shading in place of the thicker lines. Drawing of the compound eyes connected with the thorax.

For its fantastic view, the male of *Troides paradisea* is even depicted on the One toea coin of Papua New Guinea, released in 1975 (Figure 9). The dark brown female with yellow and white or creamish markings has a wingspan ranging from 140 mm to 190 mm. Adult males fly high around trees rarely descending to the ground. Females fly below the canopy searching for the food plant which is a species of *Aristolochia* with orange fruits. There is much variation both within and between subspecies. There are ten subspecies (Figure 10).

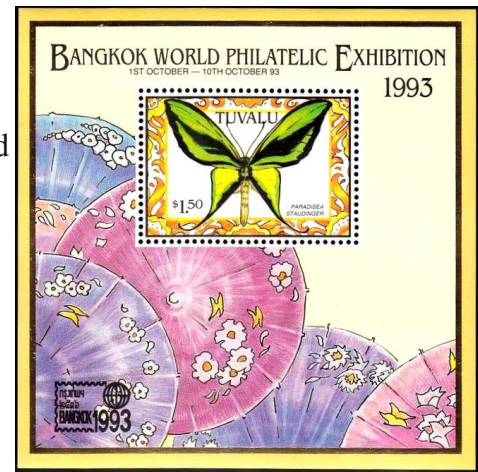


Figure 6 – Souvenir sheet of Tuvalu 1993 with butterfly *Ornithoptera paradisea* Staudinger

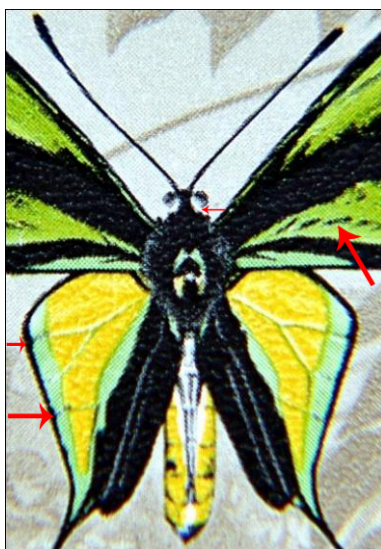


Figure 7, 7a - Stamp of Papua New Guinea 1966 with male *Troides paradisea*



Figure 8, 8a - Stamp of Papua New Guinea 1966 with male *Troides paradisea*



Figure 9 – Stamp of Papua New Guinea 1975 shows a 1t coin, which has on it the male of butterfly *Troides paradisea*.

This winged jewel is among the world's rarest and most beautiful butterflies. Really magical, heavenly beauty! It is protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The *Ornithoptera paradisea* is a true miracle of nature and is one of the most unusual



Figure 11 – Entire postal of Romania 1974 with butterfly *Troides paradisea* in collection of the Grigore Antipa National Museum of Natural History in Bucharest.

about 200-800 m. The wings are completely transparent apart from the pink blushes and the delicate eye spots.

The adults are almost always encountered singly. They are denizens of the darkest and dampest recesses of the rainforest, and appear to be very localised. The butterflies are crepuscular in nature - they can sometimes be found in the middle of the day, but are far more often encountered at dusk than at any other time. The flight is low over the ground, skulking and phantom-like. The wing beats are deep and slow, but the butterfly is capable of moving rapidly if disturbed. It normally settles with the wings closed, and at such times is extremely difficult to locate. But when a butterfly spreads its wings, you can see a rare look as the butterfly display the vivid paradise-pink of it's hindwings. The butterflies tend to remain deep in the undergrowth, but emerge at dusk to feed at rotting palm fruits on the forest floor, or on fluids exuding from decomposing fungi. They remain stationary for long periods, but are easily put up, and if disturbed retreat into the undergrowth. However they are habitual in behaviour, and often return within a few minutes.

The Skippers are often considered as “sub-standard” butterflies. They differ from other butterflies in their moth-like robust appearance and their hairy bodies. Skippers cannot hold their wings flat, which also distinguishes them from other butterflies. Many people think that all Skippers are rather small, drab and inconspicuous little butterflies. They obviously have never come across *Abantis paradisea*. Due to this butterfly's exquisite wing pattern and coloration, it may have hailed from paradise.



Figure 13 - Stamp of Swaziland 1987 with butterfly Paradise Skipper.

butterflies in the world and is on display in major Natural History museums (Figure 11).

One of the most elusive and exceedingly beautiful butterflies in the rainforest is the Paradise Phantom butterfly with the scientific name *Cithaerias phantoma* (Figure 12).

*Cithaerias phantoma* is found in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Its wingspan reaches 4 - 5 centimetres. This species is found only in deeply shaded areas of primary rainforest, at altitudes between



Figure 10 – Stamp of Oman 1972 with butterfly *Troides paradisea aurifolia*.



Figure 12 - Stamp of Guinea-Bissau 2011 with butterfly Paradise Phantom - *Cithaerias phantoma*.

The butterfly *Abantis paradisea* is commonly known as the Paradise Skipper (Figure 13). Members of this species are named for their quick, darting flights habits. It is found in Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Swaziland, Rhodesia, Zimbabwe and from Botswana to Somalia. Paradise Skippers



vary in size with males' wingspan about 40 – 45 mm and females slightly larger, with a wingspan of about 43 – 55 mm. The body length, from the tip of the head (excluding the antennae) to the end of the abdomen is about half the length of the wingspan. Skippers are characteristic butterflies with robust and hairy bodies with rounded wings. The head of the Paradise Skipper is black with white spots, while the hairy thorax is black with dark burnished-orange and white markings. Wings are black with almost transparent to light yellowish (black-demarcated) markings/windows. Adults can easily be distinguished from other butterflies by the backward-facing club on the tip of the antennae, which look like



Figure 14 - Stamp of Swaziland 1992 with butterfly Paradise Skipper.



Figure 15 - Souvenir sheet of St. Thomas & Prince 1989 with myriad of butterflies.

The Author is ready to help for philatelists in creating of philatelic exhibits on butterflies and moths. His address: Vladimir Kachan, street Kulibina 9-49, Minsk-52, BY-220052, Republic of Belarus, E-mail: vladimirkachan@mail.ru

When resting they keep their wings angled upwards or spread out and rarely fold them completely. This species belongs to an endemic Afrotropical genus. The genus occurs in a variety of habitats, including rainforest, dry forest and both dry and moist savanna. Most species of 'paradise skippers' with a varied array of colourful wing patterns are scarce or rare.

Butterfly life is short - but in many cultures they are considered a symbol of eternity. And there is no contradiction in this. After all, everything that causes emotions, gives joy, expresses love and good feelings - all this makes the world a better place, and therefore remains in it forever. That is why people are so attracted to botanical gardens, where exotic butterflies flit. We associate the Garden of Eden with an abundance of flowers, exotic birds and a myriad of colorful butterflies (Figure 15). Celebrate your special day in a tropical paradise surrounded by butterflies!

I hope that thematic philatelists will have many more interesting discoveries of the philatelic material of the world with charming butterflies.