

THE PUMA SEEN THROUGH MAXIMUM CARDS

Terry Watson, Maximum Card Study Unit

[Ed. note: Terry Watson is President of the Maximum Card Study Unit. That group is offering a free full year membership to members of the Biology Unit who are also ATA members. To join, send your address to Terry at (terryw7633@comcast.net).]

Maximaphily is a philatelic specialty in which three components—stamp, postcard, and postmark—all come harmoniously together to create what is called a maximum card. The word “maximum” points to the aim of creating the most possible agreement, or concordance among the stamp, postcard, and postmark.

The *Fédération Internationale de Philatélie* (FIP) has defined what it takes to have a correct, exhibit quality maximum card. The FIP states that the stamp must be “valid for postage” and that it must be affixed to the picture side of a postcard that is of the same subject matter as is the stamp. For this article, maximum cards that have been created (“realized”) using postally valid stamps of pumas that have been placed on postcards of pumas will serve as examples in the explanation of the basics of what this field of philately entails

The U.S. Postal Service has issued six face-different stamps of the Puma (*Puma concolor*). This wild cat is known by many names, including cougar, mountain lion, panther, catamount, and red tiger. At one time, the puma was categorized into 32 subspecies living in a wide range of habitats throughout much of the Americas. However, in the 1980s, genetic studies led scientists to reduce this number to only six of which five live in South America and only one variety in North America, the *Puma concolor* cougar.

But the taxonomy of the puma is still not resolved, with many researchers involved in the conservation efforts of the Florida panther continuing to list this cat native to south Florida as the subspecies, *Puma concolor coryi*. Three of the six cougar stamps issued by the USPS are of the highly endangered Florida Panther. The first maximum card (Figure 1) has Sc#4099c from the Southern Florida Wetland Wildlife sheet affixed to the picture side of a postcard of a Florida Panther published by Impact.

The postmark is the third component in the creation of a maximum card. According to the standards of the FIP, a correct maximum card must have “concordance of place.” This means that there must be a connection between the name of the locality where the card received its postmark and the subject matter of the card and stamp.

This maximum card has the stamp tied to the postcard with an official, circle-date first day of issue (FDOI) cancel from Naples, Florida. Naples is a concordant place in that it is located near the Everglades where the Florida panther can be found. The Naples Zoo also has Florida panthers as residents, adding to the concordance of the card.



Fig. 1. *Puma concolor coryi* (USA, 2006, Sc#4099c)

On the second maximum card (Figure 2), Sc#4099c has been affixed to a postcard published by Dick Deutsch, Company, Inc., that pictures a frontal view of a Florida panther. The stamp has been tied to the postcard with an official, pictorial FDOI cancel from Naples, Florida. The fact that this pictorial postmark depicts three rosette spoonbills does not take away too much from the card. However, if the US postal artists would have depicted the panther on the postmark instead of waterfowl, this card would have been more “subject concordance” between the stamp, postcard, and postmark.

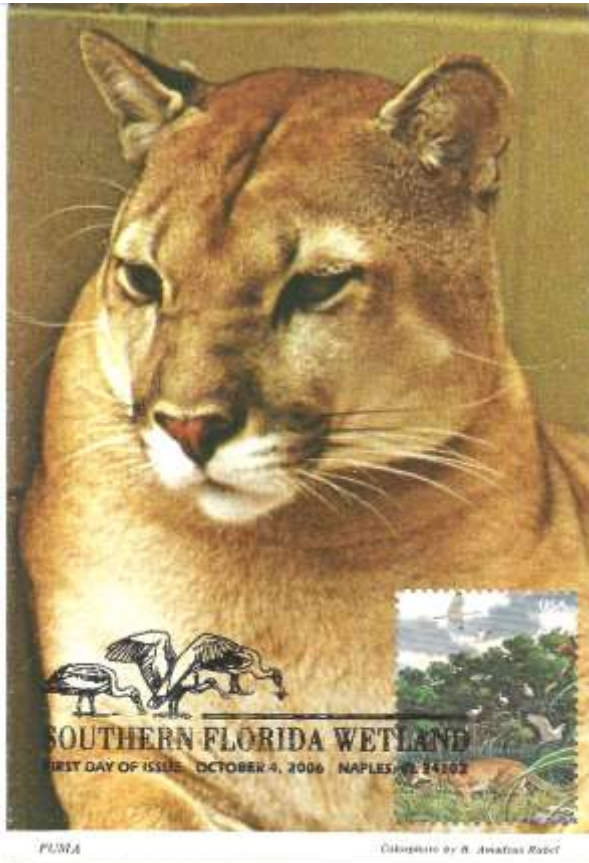


Fig. 2. *Puma concolor coryi* (USA, 2006, Sc#4099c)

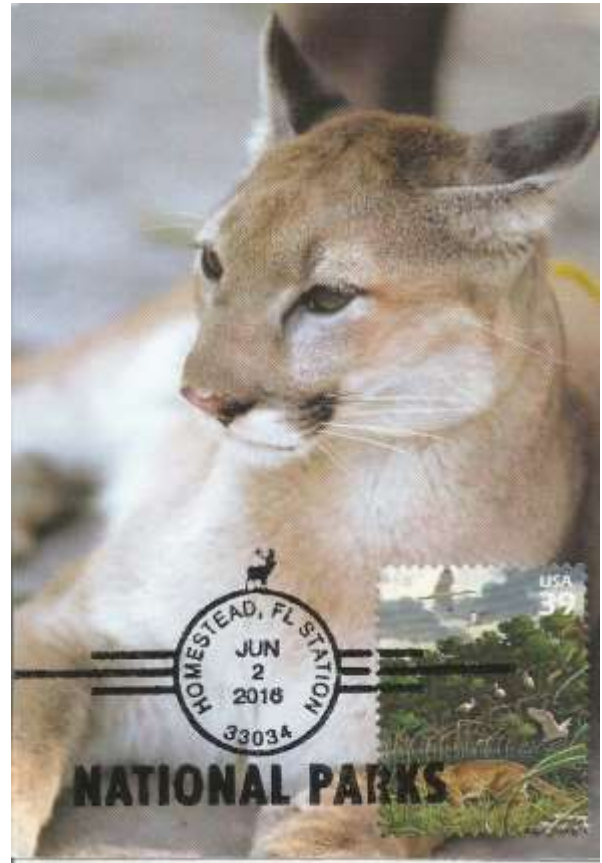


Fig. 3. *Puma concolor coryi* (USA, 2016, Sc#4099c)

On the third card (Figure 3), Sc#4099c has been tied to a Florida Panther postcard published by the Sierra Club with a more recent special National Parks postmark from Homestead, Florida. This postmark was one of a series of 16 special postmarks that the USPS offered to coincide with the 16 stamps issued on 2 June 2016, for the National Park Service centennial. There is a ten year time span between the issuance of this stamp and the postmark.

While postmarks that are closer to the issue date are generally more desirable, a pictorial cancel that is offered even ten years later is acceptable. The city of Homestead is place concordant in that this city is the gateway to the main entrance of the Everglades National Park.

Sc#4099c again has been used in the “realization” of the fourth maximum card (Figure 4). This stamp has been affixed to an Everglades National Park postcard published by Impact showing a Florida Panther at rest. This card has received a four-bar, circle-date killer postmark from Ochopee, Florida. It is often mistakenly assumed that a “correct” maximum card must have a FDOI cancel, or some other special

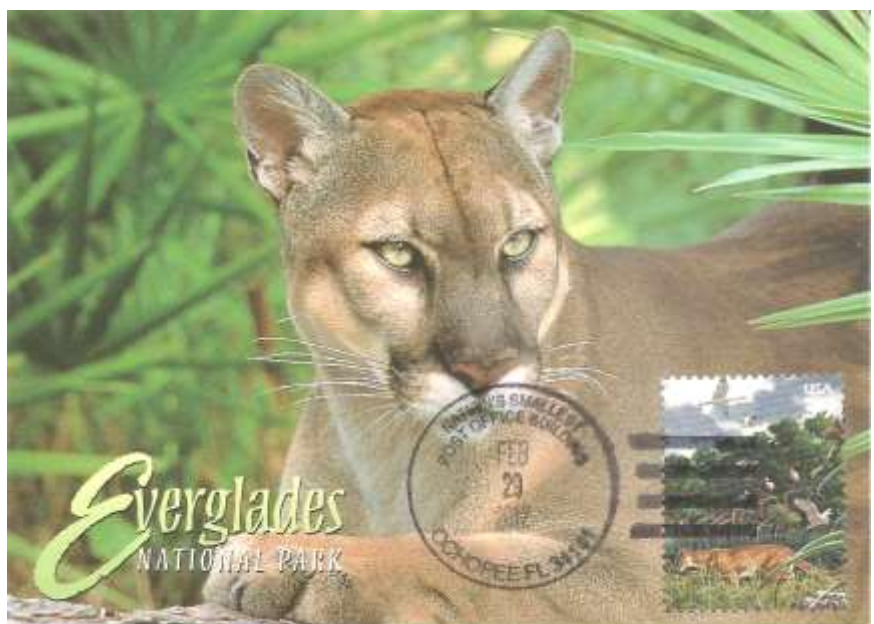


Fig. 4. *Puma concolor coryi* (USA, 2012, Sc#4099c)

postmark. This is not true as an ordinary circled-date postmark can be used as long as there is place concordance. Ochopee, Florida is place concordant because its location is within the range of the Florida Panther. The fact that the Ochopee Post Office building is the smallest in the United States adds interest to the card.

A maximum card should show as much “visual concordance” as possible between the postcard and the stamp. This visual concordance is most evident in the next maximum card (Figure 5) in which the stamp (Sc#3105m) and the postcard show the frontal portrait of a Florida Panther.

The FDOI postmark used on this card has both positive and negative features. The fact that the pictorial postmark also depicts a Florida Panther is a plus, but the fact that the cancellation site is San Diego is a minus since California is obviously not in the habitat range of the Florida Panther, nor does the San Diego Zoo have any Florida Panthers in its menagerie. However, if one uses the broader taxonomy interpretation that the Florida Panther is a sub-species of the Puma, then this card can be considered as place concordant.

Figure 6 depicts Sc#3105m affixed to a Chinese postcard of a Puma in a tree. The ordinary, four-bar circle-date postmark from Everglades City, Florida, is very concordant. The stamp was issued in 1996, and the postmark on this card was in 1999. A regular town cancellation is generally accepted if it is franked within five years of the stamps issue date.

It must be noted that it is getting more difficult to receive regular circle-date postmarks in black ink as US post offices continue to convert to red ink. For no identifiable reason, many maximaphilists shun red ink.

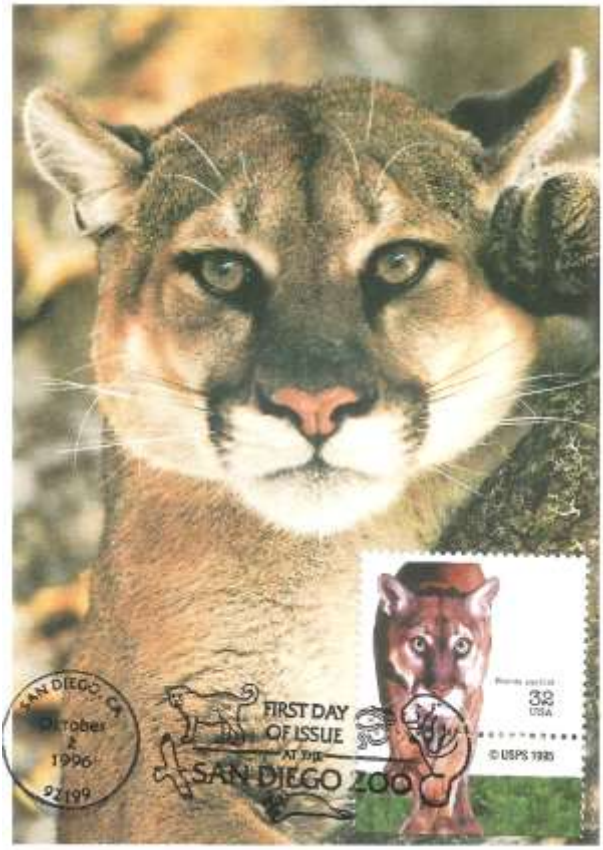


Fig. 5. *Puma concolor coryi* (USA, 1996, Sc#3105m)



Fig. 6. *Puma concolor coryi* (USA, 1996, Sc#3105m)

The Montana Flag stamp (Sc#4304) from the Flags of Our Nation series offered the opportunity for the realization of more Puma maximum cards. Figure 7 is a maximum card that uses this stamp on a postcard published by Impact of a Puma chasing a Snowshoe Hare in the snow.

Helena, Montana is place concordant in that the city falls into the range of the Puma. In fact, in recent years there have been Puma sightings near Helena’s city limits.

Figure 8 is a maximum card that has Sc#2292 showing a Mountain Lion from the 1987 CAPEX Wildlife sheet affixed to a postcard of this cat.

The “Wildlife Expo Station” postmark from Sacramento, California, pictures a Mountain Lion with open jaws. With all three maximum card components (stamp, postcard, and cancellation) depicting a Mountain Lion makes this card a highly desirable “triple.”



Fig. 7. *Puma concolor* (USA, 2010, Sc#4304)



Fig. 8. *Puma concolor* (USA, 2010, Sc#4304)

Other factors also make this a desirable card. The location of the stamp, postmark, and the pictured animal on the postcard makes this a visually appealing card. The esthetic appeal is an important factor in the realization of maximum cards.

The rarity of a postcard also adds to the value of a maximum card and this Chinese postcard would be difficult to obtain in the USA. The fact that the postcard and the stamp picture the Mountain Lion in the snow adds to the “maximum” visual concordance of the card.

It must be noted that some FDOI cancellations do not meet place concordance standards and, therefore, some first day cancels cannot be used in the creation of maximum cards.

Figure 9 is an example of this situation. The 2007 definitive stamp of a Florida Panther (Sc#4139) has been affixed to a postcard (publisher not listed) of a Florida Panther. The four-bar FDOI cancellation from Washington, DC is not place concordant as the DC area is not within the habitat range of the puma, nor does the Washington Zoo have a Florida Panther as a resident.

However, if the Smithsonian Zoo has a resident Puma, the card could be considered concordant using the broader taxonomy classification as mentioned earlier.

Figure 10, using Sc#2292, provides an example of something that is not a correct maximum card according to the

FIP standard. Although the stamp, postcard, and postmark are all concordant, the postcard was created by Unicover Corporation expressly for the use in the creation of this “maximum card.” The regulations of maximaphily established by the FIP state that a postcard must not have been created solely for the making of a maximum card. This FIP standard also means that the “official maximum cards” issued by postal administrations are not maximum cards worthy of exhibiting.

Finally, Figure 11 depicts a very problematic maximum card. The most obvious problem is the poor cancellation obtained from the Sherman, Texas, post office. A correct maximum card must have a postmark that is legible. The water-based inks used by many post offices for their special cancellations often result in poor cancellation strikes on glossy postcards. This is one of the major challenges in the creation of maximum cards. Another issue with this card is that it was published a number of years after the stamp was issued. The FIP rules state that the postcard should have been published prior to the issuance of the stamp.



Fig. 9. *Puma concolor coryi* (USA, 2009, Sc#4139)

I hope that these Puma maximum cards have given you a good introduction to the basics of maximaphily and that the FIP standards of correct maximum cards have not been overwhelming.

Someone who is beginning the collection of maximum cards should not be too concerned about FIP regulations in that these standards are set for the exhibiting of maximum cards. I feel that if one can master the concordance of stamp, postcard, and postmark, you are well on your way. As always, collect what you like personally.



You can find a full reading of the FIP standards at

<http://www.maximaphily.info/regulations.html>.