

**The 2007 Hula Reserve Stamps of Israel**

Ron Berger

The Hula Lake used to spread over 23 sq. miles (60 sq. km) of mostly swamps and still waters. The typically warm weather of the Jordan Valley turned it into a natural hothouse for a wide variety of flora and fauna. Early Holy Land naturalists soon realized its importance as a rich habitat and identified in and around it many species, some at the extreme edge of their ranges, others rare and a few endemic. Thus, the lake is the northernmost natural habitat of the Paper Reed (*Cyperus papyrus*), a plant of prime importance to recent Human development as the source of paper. This plant adorns the 1956 regular issue **Airmail** stamp (left) and its tab and appears in the other stamp issues dedicated to the Hula



Reserve.

It has been more than fifty years since the 1956 **Airmail** stamp was issued, but despite its incidental appearance in the **Jordan Valley Birds** set of 2002 (see above), the only stamp dedicated to the Hula Reserve was the 80ag stamp of the **Nature Reserves in Israel** set of 1990 (second series out of three). Stamps were issued in 1959 and 1983 commemorating jubilees of Yesod HaMa'ala, on the shores of the lake (as shown in the map of the area, prior to the lake being drained, on the tab of the earlier of the two issues, above right), but this unique locality was not to be seen on another Israeli stamp until now, not even in the vast definitive **Landscapes of Israel** series on the 1970's.

In the 1990 issue shows Yellow Water Lilies (*Nuphar lutea*) and Paper Reeds, the latter also shown in the tab, alongside an Eastern White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*). The reserve is at the heart of this pelican's annual migration route and it also serves as an inviting temporary home for the few individuals that failed to complete their travels to Africa or Europe and stop in the Hula area, feeding on the abundant fish of the lake and the nearby ponds while they wait to rejoin their flocks on their return journey. Two of these species also appear in the central stamp of the current issue, the Eastern White Pelican and the Paper Reed, but this time the abundance of species is all but bewildering. Like the Paper Reed, the Pelican also appears in the 2007 issue.



The Israel Philatelic Service's December 2007 **Hula Reserve** series is the ninth issue of stamps designed by graphic artist Tuvia Kurz. Among the earlier series he has to his name one can find the 2002 **Jordan Valley Birds** set of stamps, the 2004 **Red Sea Fish** set and sheetlet and the 2005 **Animals in the Bible** set and sheetlet. The 2006 and 2007 **Spices** definitive issues are also based on his work. But if you merely conclude that Tuvia only became the leading designer of Israeli flora and fauna stamps, you should be reminded that he also drew the picture of **Rechavam Ze'evy** used by Daniel Goldberg in designing the 2002 stamp commemorating the late General and Cabinet Minister, and that he designed the 1999 **Lovely Butterfly** stamps commemorating the very popular Educational TV show whose animated opening sequence he also created.



**JORDAN VALLEY BIRDS, 2002.** In the way Tuvia positioned his subjects against their backgrounds in these stamps his attention to detail becomes obvious – Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) flying over the crucial rest and feeding stop at the Hula, northbound to their nesting sites in Europe, Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*) circling over the verdant river bed and the parched hills of the Transjordanian desert, Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) hovering above their habitat in the high cliffs of the Eastern Judean Desert. It is noteworthy that Israel looks upon the Jordan Valley from the west, so by arranging these stamps

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as above an image emerges that seems to be "right" to anyone looking at them from Israel, with the southernmost Massada and Dead Sea at right, the meandering Jordan River at centre and the northernmost Golan Heights and Hula Lake at left.

**Tuvia Kurz** was born in Holon in 1947 and studied in a Tel-Aviv Applied Arts High School. After a tour of duty in the army he studied animation in the USA and when he returned home became one of the animators in the Educational TV Channel and also worked with private firms creating short animation films and artistic design works. Ten years ago he created the **Airplanes of the 1948 War** set of stamps and sheetlet for the **ISRAEL '98** exhibition, and since then he was commissioned to design several other sets and sheetlets, including the 2000 **Philately Day (Dinosaurs)** stamps and composite sheetlet. The stamp issues he created or was involved in designing reflect his two specializations – the Natural World on the one hand and Technology and Hi-Tech products on the other.



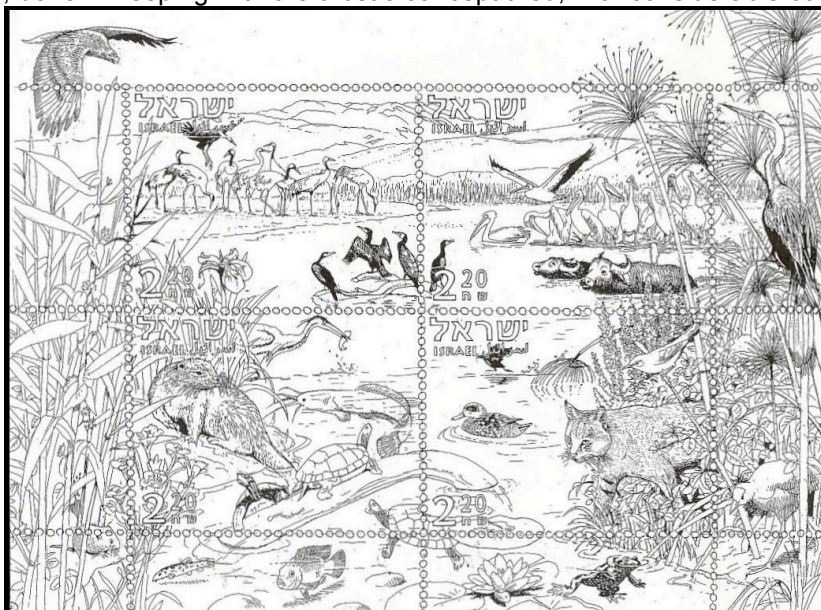
#### **ANIMALS IN THE BIBLE, 2005.**

Although the animals belonged to very different habitats in the Biblical Land of Israel, design elements at the margins between the stamps allow the viewer to perceive the whole design as forming a single, continuous picture. These elements also appear in the separate stamps, where they are part of the specific habitat depicted in each one.

Although there are but four stamps in the set and sheetlet, five different animal species are shown in either one. In the bottom left stamp in the sheetlet, next to the Nile Crocodile, there is a white, brown and black bird, a Spurred-winged Plover (*Vanellus spinosus*).

This species Plover, though not mentioned in the Bible, is indigenous in this part of the world and must have been well known in the area since antiquity.

The 2005 **Animals in the Bible** stamps won acclaim as a remarkable item of high quality graphic art, and were very well received by the Israeli philatelic community as well as by collectors throughout the world. It was therefore no surprise that the 2007 **Hula Reserve** issue started its way as a set of four stamps and a sheetlet in the same format. The following line drawing is the original design Tuvia Kurz submitted to the Philatelic Service, done in keeping with the artistic concept tried, with considerable commercial success, only

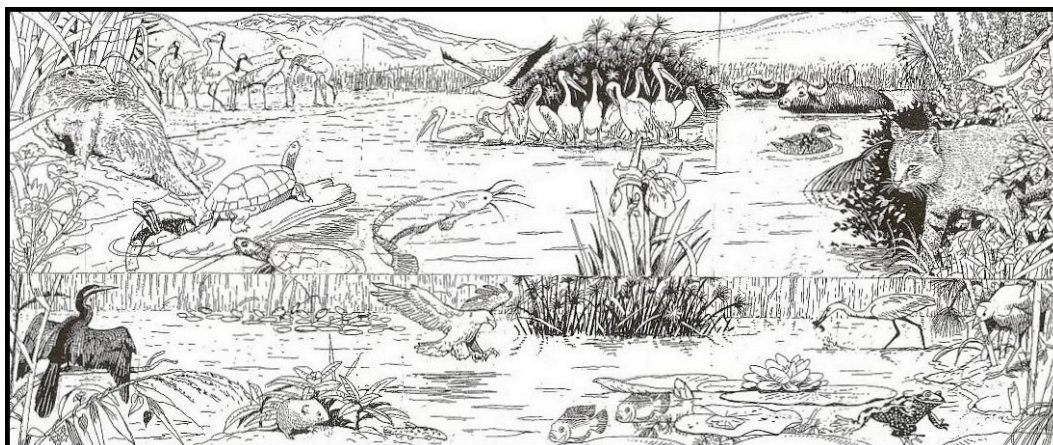


two years before.

**HULA RESERVE, 2007.** A preliminary line drawing essay. Most of the fauna and flora species found in the issued stamps can already be seen and identified in this essay, often with the depiction details unchanged.

But then the plans for the issue were altered. Instead of a set of four separate stamps and a sheetlet it was decided to issue only three stamps, but in two formats – a self-adhesive booklet of six stamps, two of each design, all without tabs, and a composite mini sheet of nine stamps, three in a row, with tabs attached to the bottom row and the stamps placed in different positions in every row. The following line drawing, submitted by Tuvia to the Philatelic Service after the change in plans, shows the restructured design before the addition of colours. The lines separating the stamps and the tabs are entered by a ruler, and it can be clearly seen that the tabs' design is drawn as a separate picture from that of the stamps.

The Hula Lake was naturally shallow, being mostly a swamp of standing water. As the region is warm and humid, it became a prime breeding ground for the *Anopheles* mosquitoes that transmit the Malaria parasites to humans, and local human populations suffered continually from the ravages of this disease. In the early 1950's it was decided to drain the swamps and lake in a drive to eliminate this disease and reclaim vast acres of possibly rich farmland to the emerging state. At the time the UN, via the World Health Organization, was spearheading a campaign to eradicate malaria, and additional budgets in foreign currency made the draining more attractive and economically feasible. No one gave thought to the possible ecological ramifications of the draining (or of rampant use of chemicals like DDT elsewhere). As the area was drained a small artificial lake was left, making the first nature reserve in Israel, but many rare, endemic species became extinct. The area of the tabs in the new design was dedicated to commemorate the damage suffered by the environment due to Man's ambitions and pride.



**HULA RESERVE, 2007.** A second line drawing essay, for three stamps with tabs. Most of the animals and plants are depicted in a manner similar to that used in the issued stamps, already occupying the same places they would have in the tab row. The most noticeable differences are in the positions of the turtles and catfish (which are transposed in the final design), the change in the direction of the catfish and the removal of the leftmost turtle.

The difference between the stamps and tabs is accentuated by presenting the two parts as separate, non continuous sections. While the stamps depict the nature reserve in the present, the tabs show the lost world of Hula before the swamp was drained in the early 1950's. Even at this stage it can be clearly seen that the two rows of pictures are meant to be viewed separately, probably suggesting a fundamental difference between their subjects. Once colours are added to the line drawing this difference will become even more obvious.



**HULA RESERVE, 2007.** Full colour artist's drawing of the final design, without inscriptions. These will inevitably be placed over various design details that can still be clearly seen in this drawing, like the finer points in the appearance of the second Caspian Turtle in the centre stamp. In the issued stamps the colour of the tabs was altered to resemble an old sepia photograph.

**HULA RESERVE, 2007.** Tab row. The details are arranged in such a way that the parts shown in the three stamps allow their positions to be changed in each of the three rows of the composite sheet and still create a continuous design. In this final version the design is full of life and motion, as in the case of the Jungle Cat emerging from the thicket of Wild Strawberry, or the Goliath Heron catching a fish in its beak, giving the viewers the feeling of watching a live scene as it occurs.



Actually the 2007 **Hula Reserve** stamps were issued in two formats. The first, already discussed above, is the composite post office counter sheetlets of nine se-tenant stamps on normal stamp printing gummed paper (with water activated PVA gum), perforated 14 X 13½. These sheetlets are described as "composite" since the stamps in each row are set in a different order. The tab row has the designs organized as C–B–A, the second row A–C–B and the top row B–A–C. In Israeli stamps the bottom row in the sheet is more commonly referred to as the "tab row" since the illustrated tabs are usually attached to it, as in the illustration above. Hebrew is written right to left, so it is customary to treat the stamps in the same manner, making the rightmost stamp in the tab row the first and proceeding accordingly. In these sheets each stamp has a face value of NIS2.25, so a row costs NIS6.75 and the whole sheetlet costs NIS20.25. The stamps, rows and sheetlets are sold at these prices over the counter in post offices, so they are often called "post office counter sheets". Most of the tab rows from post office counter sheets are removed prior to the delivery of the sheets to post offices, to be used in the distribution of issues to Philatelic Service subscribers, but in principle all the Israeli commemorative stamps issued are available to the public for mail franking purposes (or for collecting) and are sold for such usage.

The second format of issue of the 2007 **Hula Reserve** stamps is in booklets of two types. The first is a booklet of six se-tenant stamps that are issued with self-adhesive gum and have die cut perforations that measure 11. As in the other format, each stamp has a face value of NIS2.25, so a booklet of six costs NIS13.50 (at the time of writing NIS2.25 are worth approximately US\$0.65). The stamps in the booklet are set in a column of six in two parts. The top half has designs A–A–B, the bottom half B–C–C. None have tabs, and the separation between the halves is to allow the booklet to be folded comfortably into a wallet without damaging the stamps near the fold line.

The second type, to be released in the May 14 – 21 **Israel 2008** international stamp exhibition, is a "prestige" booklet that contains two blocks of six self-tenant self-adhesive stamps without tabs (each has two rows of three in changing order, as in the composite sheetlet) and pages with bilingual (Hebrew and English) short stories, enlarged pictures from the stamps and riddles for children, presenting the various animals in terms suitable for the younger generation. The price of the booklet is NIS27, making it too costly in my opinion for the average youth. The illustrations in this booklet, except for the stamps and details copied from them, are the work of Ms. Tovit Uriel, with Hebrew texts by Assi Weinstein translated to English by Mrs. Marcie Goldstein-Wattelman.

As can be seen in the drawings and tab row above, the 2007 stamps show a vast array of wildlife species. For the sake of the many flora and fauna themes among us, here is a list of these species, compiled from the leaflet produced by the Philatelic Service and expanded to include their scientific identification with the kind help of the stamps designer, Tuvia Kurz.

**In the right hand stamp** (top stamp in the booklet, right):

Bird at right – Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) – a common visitor, large flocks live near water sources in the north of the country in summer.

Plants with pink flowers at right – Wild Raspberry (*Rubus sanctus*) – a common plant growing in dense thickets near running water in north and central Israel. The flowers are rich in nectar and the fruits are sweet and edible.

Feline emerging from raspberries – Jungle / Swamp Cat (*Felis chaus*) – one of three species of wild cats in Israel, most often found in wet areas.

Swimming at centre – Marbled Teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*) – a resident water fowl in the Hula and fish ponds in the north of Israel.

Pair bathing in the background – Asian Water Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) – a species of wild cattle typical to south central Asia and Indo-China. A small herd lives in the Hula Reserve, where it serves as a major attraction for visitors.

Riding one of the buffaloes – Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – a common resident, with flocks live in the northern Jordan Valley and in the coastal planes.

**In the tab of the right hand stamp** (not in the booklet):

Bird approaching the water's edge – Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) – a rare visitor to Israel. A few uncorroborated sightings notwithstanding, it is believed to have become extinct in the region after the Hula was drained.

Bird catching a fish at centre – Goliath Heron (*Ardea Goliath*) – a rare visitor from Africa and South Asia, with no resident population.

Frog in the water – Black-bellied (Painted) Frog (*Discoglossus nigriventer*) – an amphibian discovered in the Hula in 1940, known as endemic, it probably became extinct when the Hula was drained.

Water plant (also in the rear of the left tab) – White Water Lily (*Nymphaea odorata*) – impressive aquatic plant that is extinct in Israel since the Hula was drained. Attempts are made to reintroduce it in an effort to enrich the environment.

**In the middle stamp:**

Flower at front – Pale Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) – widespread in Israel as a wild flower and as a domesticated plant in public and private gardens.

On tree trunk at front and in the water – Caspian Turtle (*Mauremys caspica*) – until recently quite common in central and north Israel, in the last decade the population plummeted as a result of habitat loss. Possibly endangered.

Flock at centre – Eastern White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocratalus*) – large flocks pass through Israel in the annual migrations. Each year some individuals drop out and stay here, waiting to rejoin their flocks on the next migration.



Thicket in background (also on the shore and in the tab) – Paper Reed (*Cyperus papyrus*) – a rare habitat for this sedge outside its native north-east Africa, where it grows in abundance on the banks of the Nile.

**In the tab of the middle stamp (not in the booklet):**

Two fishes at right (partly hidden by inscription) – Tristram's St. Peter's Fish (*Tristramella simonis intermedia*) – was common in the Hula but extinct in this site. A residual population may exist in the Sea of Galilee.

Fish at left – (Jordan Valley) River Loach (*Nun Galileus*) – a rare endemic fish without scales, it became extinct in Israel when the Hula was drained. May still exist in Lake Muzairib in Syria (no current data available).

Bird landing on water – White-tailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – was mainly known in Israel as occasional visitor, with few nesting pairs, mostly in the upper Galilee. When the Hula was drained the local population became extinct and now efforts are made to reintroduce it by captive breeding and controlled release.

**In the left hand stamp (bottom stamp in the booklet, right):**

Fish at right – Common Catfish (*Clarias Gariepinus*) – a common predatory fish in bodies of sweet water in the Syrian–African rift valley, from Israel to southern Africa.

Emerging from the water – Common Otter (*Lutra lutra*) – well established in Israel in the past, it was over hunted for its fur and as a threat to fish ponds and became rare. Strictly protected, it seems to be gaining ground.

Pink flowers at left – Hairy Willow-herb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) – an evergreen common near water.

Birds on shore – Common Crane (*Grus grus*) – a migrating bird considered a portent of good luck in East Asia, it is best known in the West for its impressive dances. Numerous sieges, made of thousands of individuals, winter each year in agricultural areas and near fish ponds, attracting bird watching tourists to the region.

**In the tab of the left stamp (not in the booklet):**

Rodent on the shore – Water Vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) – common in Europe and Asia. In Israel its remains were discovered near the Hula in droppings of nocturnal raptors. Believed to have lived in the area and become extinct when the Hula was drained.

Bird at left – African Darter (*Anhinga rufa*) – a rare visitor in Israel at the best of times, it became extinct locally when the Hula was drained.

The three stamps and their tabs therefore show twenty three different species of flora and fauna – five plants, three fishes, one amphibian, one reptile, nine birds and four mammals. Most make their first appearance on Israeli stamps in this issue. A thorough listing of the elements in the topical index of the Israel Catalogue will have these stamps listed in several categories – places in Israel (Hula Lake, Golan Heights, Mount Hermon), National Parks and Nature Reserves (Hula Reserve), and, of course, the species. These alone will add at least half a page to the index – and let's not forget that because of the two formats most entries (except for elements in the tabs) will have a double listing. These stamps will be prominent in the index and in topical catalogues (like those published by firms like Stanley Gibbons and Domfil) and in checklists like those the American Topical Association distributes.

In my opinion the thematic importance of 2007 **Hula Reserve** stamps is based not on the variety of wildlife species shown in them, but primarily on three of the "less prominent" species, shown in two tabs: the Black-bellied Frog, Tristram's St. Peter's Fish and the Jordan Valley River Loach. They existed only in Israel (and Syria), were never species that won any attention or acclaim and to the best of our knowledge are now extinct. The two species of fishes were small, unimpressive and of no great value to fishermen, and the frog was a rare species known only to a handful of naturalists. Now that they are gone from our world they even lost the little standing they did possess as rare endemic species. It is therefore likely that this will simultaneously be their first, only and last appearance on postage stamps, making them even more valuable to thematicists.

In addition to three extinct species, for three of the species shown in these stamps the Hula is the edge of their natural range, and an edge distant from their major habitats. Two are essentially African species, one Asian. The Paper Reed is uncommon outside its native range along the Nile, and the Hula marks the northernmost point in its range. As it is shown on the other stamps dedicated to the Hula, its appearance in the 2007 issue is of lesser thematic importance than that of the other two species. Another

species is the Common Catfish, that lives in sweet water bodies in the Syrian–African rift valley, from Egypt through the great East African lakes to southern Africa. Like the Paper Reed, the Hula population is the northernmost in the natural range of this large predatory fish. The third species in this group is doubtlessly the most impressive. The normal range of the wild Asian Water Buffalo (captive domesticated herds, bred for their milk, are outside the frame of reference in discussing wild populations) is in Central sub-Himalayan Asia and Indo-China. Several herds were living in Mesopotamia, but information about their current condition is patchy. The small herd in the Hula is at the far edge of the range of this gentle species of wild cattle (very different in temperament from their aggressive African cousins). The appearance of these three species therefore adds significantly to the thematic value of this issue.

It is my belief that the triple appearance (in sheetlets and two types of booklets) of this issue marks it as being of outstanding importance to worldwide thematic collectors. In the very near future these stamps (especially in tab rows but also in booklets) will gain a place of honour in the albums of many thematicists, and I estimate that there will be a lively demand for them. I'd certainly advise collectors of flora and fauna themes to try and get these items while they can still do so at face value, and even put several tab rows and booklets aside while stocks last in the Philatelic Service. Those who'll be wise enough to follow my lead will very probably discover in the coming few years that they can get many desirable items for their collections in exchange for these stamps. Don't say I didn't give you a "heads up" in time.



For the concluding paragraphs let me return to the story of the design of these stamps. In most cases finding pictures of extant species one can use for graphic design work is easy and simple enough. For example, Tuvia told me that he photographed a captive Jungle Cat in his visits to the Tel-Aviv University Garden for Zoological Research in Ramat-Aviv, and used the photographs in designing the

picture of the Jungle Cat emerging from among the Wild Raspberries in the stamp.



**JUNGLE CAT (*FELIS CHAUS* photograph by Tuvia Kurz).** A captive specimen in the Abu-Cabir (Tel-Aviv) Zoological Centre – it is easy to see how a picture like this can serve in creating the image of the feline in the stamp.

If, as far as extant species are concerned the story is quite plain, at least for an experienced graphic artist, it certainly isn't so when one deals with extinct animals, and the 2007 **Hula Reserve** stamps incorporate several species that are not only extinct but were also virtually unknown when they still existed. How does one design stamps showing current wildlife and species whose only pictures come from old zoology books? Tuvia has already had some experience in solving a similar problem, when he designed the 2000 **Philately Day** stamps that showed dinosaurs. The various discoveries of fossilized bones enable researchers to reconstruct with reasonable accuracy the bodies and even the modes of motion of the thundering lizards, but not their skin colours or patterns. How can details like that be recreated in stamps? A partial answer is in using the conventional palettes established during the many years that graphic artists struggled with such issues. And quite a lot depends, in the final analysis, on the personal tastes and precepts of the individual artist. In the 2007 **Hula Reserve** stamps Tuvia was spared in part by the decision to give the tabs a monochrome appearance imitating black and white photographs. Still, he wanted, as far as possible, to do the extinct species justice in their representations. To achieve that in painting the Black-bellied Frog, for example, Tuvia combined two sources. He outlined the general form of the frog's body by using a current picture of an extant species of a Painted Frog and added to it the dark and light patches pattern of the Black-bellied Frog shown in an old zoology book that included photographs taken by a contemporary researcher.

In conclusion – the 2007 **Hula Reserve** stamps are, in my opinion, one of the most interesting series the Israel Philatelic Service issued in recent years. The three outstandingly well designed stamps, and their tabs, show a large variety of species which thematic collectors will find to be important and desirable. Their existence in two different formats, one of which including a prestige like booklet, will make the issue even more interesting. In this issue Tuvia Kurz and the Philatelic Service managed to create a group of items that deserves high compliments, and I believe that in the future we will see a lot of demand for these stamps and booklets among collectors.

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