

PHILATELIC LEPIDOPTERA

by MARION E. SMITH

Many entomologists who are also philatelists are collectors of insects on stamps. These include bees and beehives, mosquitoes, dragonflies, a praying mantis, termitaria, and several beetles, but by far the greatest number are butterflies or moths. The recent trend toward the issuing of sets of stamps depicting local fauna and flora has called the attention of the philatelic world to the beauties of these "jewels on wings". The 20-value set just issued by Mozambique, and the four most recent *Pro Juventute* sets of Switzerland, all in full natural color, should do much to interest collectors (of either Lepidoptera or stamps) in this special field. The entomologist may also wonder, somewhat facetiously, perhaps, about the possible consequences of this relatively new source of "publication"!

Fourteen stamp-issuing countries, from 1902 through 1953, have issued a total of ninety-nine stamps of forty-six different designs, showing forty-three species of butterflies, moths, or their caterpillars.

The first butterfly or moth to be used on a postage stamp was a Sphinx moth which appeared on seven Curaçao (type A10), thirty-one Dutch East Indies (A9), and eight Surinam (A10) stamps of 1902-1908. Appearing in the border design, the four outstretched stylized moths attract little attention (except from the entomologist). Their use on these stamps is of no scientific significance, according to the Philatelic Service of The Netherlands, for they were used only to fill up the triangles around the central medallion decoratively.

The Silkworm (*Bombyx mori* L.) has, not surprisingly, been honored philatelically more frequently than any other lepidopterous insect (though less frequently than the honeybee). Lebanon in 1930 issued a set of six stamps (A4) to commemorate the Silk Congress held in Beyrouth that year. Each shows, in fine detail, a silkworm, a silk cocoon, and a moth, on mulberry leaves. Trieste's silkworm stamp (#30, 1950) pictures larvæ (very poorly drawn) and a cocoon on mulberry leaves, but does not show the adult insect. In 1953, Italy issued a single stamp honoring AGASTINO BASSI DER LODI, whose portrait appears on the stamp, with side panels which show silk moths, silkworms on mulberry leaves, and pupæ within cut-open cocoons. It was BASSI who showed (in 1835) that the muscardine disease of silkworms, the cause of enormous losses, is contagious, and is caused by a fungus (later named *Beauveria bassiana* in his honor) which multiplies on and in the body of the insect. This was the first demonstration of an insect disease caused by a micro-organism. The stamp was issued in conjunction with the Sixth International Congress of Microbiology, held in Rome in 1953.

The most beautiful insect stamps yet issued, in my opinion, are those of the *Pro Juventute* sets of Switzerland. The insects are shown in full natural color, and in such superb detail that they can easily be recognized, in most cases, from the stamp alone. All are common European species, most of them widely distributed, and most of them Lepidoptera, although a honeybee, a damselfly (*Agrion splendens* Harris), a lady beetle (*Coccinella septempunctata* L.), and a longhorned beetle (*Purpuricenus koebleri* L.) have been included. An intriguing part of the stamp design is a delicate tracery of leaves in the background—in most cases, the food-plant of the insect. Four of these sets have been issued thus far. They appear annually just prior to the Christmas season, and are used for a limited time only; the revenue (5 to 10 centimes per stamp) which is in excess of regular postage is used for child welfare work. The Lepidoptera are listed below:

1950

- 10 plus 10 — Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta* L.) — Nymphalidæ — with leaves and blossoms of Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica* L.).
- 20 plus 10 — Blue Underwing (*Catocala fraxini* L.) — Phalænidæ — with leaves and catkin of Black Poplar (*Populus nigra* L.).
- 40 plus 10 — Sulphur Butterfly (*Colias palæno* L., probably race *europomene* O. from the Alps — male) — Pieridæ — with fruit and insect-eaten leaves of Bog Whortleberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum* L.).

1951

- 20 plus 10 — Black-veined Swallowtail (*Papilio podalirius* L.) — Papilionidæ — with leaves of Mahaleb Cherry (*Prunus mahaleb* L.).
- 30 plus 10 — Orange-tip (*Anthocaris cardamines* L. — male) — Pieridæ — with flowering plant of *Cardamine pratensis* L., the Cuckoo Flower or Meadow Bittercress.
- 40 plus 10 — Peacock Moth (*Saturnia pyri* Schiffr.) — Saturniidæ — with leaves of Pear (*Pyrus communis* L.).

1952

- 20 plus 10 — Marbled White or Barred-wing Butterfly (*Melanargia galathea* L.) — Satyridæ — with Couch or Quack Grass (*Agropyron repens* L.).
- 30 plus 10 — Silver-gray Argus or Chalk-hill Blue (*Lysandra coridon* Poda — ♂ — Lycænidæ — with flowering sprig of Vetch. (This is reported by the Swiss Philatelic Agency to be Crown Vetch, *Coronilla vaginalis* Lam., although it seems to resemble more closely Horse-shoe Vetch, *Hippocrepis comosa* L., a favorite food-plant.)
- 40 plus 10 — Oak Eggar (*Lasiocampa quercus* L.) — Lasiocampidæ — with leaves and acorn of White Oak (*Quercus Robur* L.).

1953

- 10 plus 10 — Nun Moth (*Lymantria monacha* L.) — Lymantriidæ — with needles and cone of Scotch Pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.).
- 20 plus 10 — Mourning Cloak or Camberwell Beauty (*Nymphalis antiopa* L.) — Nymphalidæ — with leaves of Birch (*Betula* species, probably *B. pendula*).

Mozambique in 1953 issued a set of twenty stamps showing butterflies and moths, the most extensive single set of insect stamps yet issued. Included are nine butterflies and eleven moths of Western Africa, shown in fairly accurate natural colors, each bearing the scientific name of the insect. They are:

- 10 c — *Papilio demodocus* Esp. — Papilionidæ
 15 c — *Amphicallia thelwalli* Drc. — Arctiidæ
 20 c — *Euxanthe wakefieldi* Ward — Nymphalidæ
 30 c — *Axiocerces harpax* F. — Lycænidæ
 40 c — *Teracolus omphale* Godt. — Pieridæ
 50 c — *Papilio dardanus tibullus* Kby. — Papilionidæ
 80 c — *Nudaurelia bersilia dido* M. & W. — Saturniidæ
 \$ 1.00 — *Argema mimosæ* Bdv. — Saturniidæ
 \$ 1.50 — *Papilio antheus evombaroides* Eim. — Papilionidæ
 \$ 2.00 — *Athletes* (labelled as *ethra* Westw., an evident misspelling for *ethica* Westw., but more closely resembling Seitz's description of *semialba* South.)
 \$ 2.30 — *Danaus chrysippus* L. — Danaidæ
 \$ 2.50 — *Papilio phorcas ansorgei* Rtsch. — Papilionidæ
 \$ 3.00 — *Arniocera ericata* Btlr. — Zygænidæ
 \$ 4.00 — *Pseudambelia appollinaris* Bdv. — Saturniidæ
 \$ 4.50 — *Egybolis vaillantina* Stoll. — Phalænidæ
 \$ 5.00 — *Metarctia lateritia* H.S. — Syntomidæ
 \$ 6.00 — *Xanthospilopteryx mozambica* Mab. — Agaristidæ
 \$ 7.50 — *Nyctemera leuconoe* Hpffr. — Arctiidæ
 \$10.00 — *Charaxes azota* Hew. — Nymphalidæ
 \$20.00 — *Ægocera fervida* Wlk. — Agaristidæ

The Swallowtail and Birdwing butterflies of the family Papilionidæ have, naturally, appeared frequently on stamps. The first was Sarawak's 1950 stamp (#180) showing Brooke's Birdwing (*Troides brookeana* Wallace), which was named by the great naturalist-explorer in honor of Captain Brooke, brother of the White Rajah of Sarawak. The black-and-white reproduction scarcely does justice to this huge strikingly-colored green and velvety-black insect. In 1953, the Republic of Maluku Selatan, in the Moluccas, heart of the Birdwing empire, issued six stamps in gaudy (but not too accurate) natural colors, featuring butterflies of this family. Although the names of the insects have not been officially announced, a check with Seitz's *Macrolepidoptera* identifies them tentatively as four Birdwings: *Troides* (or

"Ornithoptera") *brookeana* Wall., *T. priamus* probably *poseidon* Dbl., *T. hypolitus* Cram., and *T. priamus cræsus* Wall. or *T. p. lydius* Fldr.; and two Swallowtails: *Papilio memnon venusia* Seitz and *P. ulysseus telegonus* Fldr. The 1953 Mozambique set discussed above includes four of the more than one hundred swallowtails known from Africa, and late in 1935 Spanish Guinea issued two stamps showing another well-known African swallowtail, *Papilio antimachus* Dru., one of the largest of all known butterflies.

The *Morpho* butterflies of the New World are represented on only one stamp, issued in 1953 by British Honduras. Called only a "Blue Butterfly", it is perhaps *Morpho peleides hyacinthus* Btlr., which occurs there.

In 1948, Chile issued a set of twenty-five stamps in each of three values, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the appearance of Claude Gay's monumental work on the "Historia física y política de Chile". Among the animals and plants depicted are a Praying Mantis (*Mantis gayi*), a stag beetle (*Chiosagnathus grantii*), and a moth (*Castnia eudesmia* Gray) of the family Castniidæ. This is a day-flying, flower-feeding moth, most active in brightest sunshine. It is said to be difficult to catch, and when caught, struggles violently, scratching severely with strong tibial spurs.

Rather surprisingly, the only stamp known to me which shows a butterfly which cannot be identified is a semi-postal of The Netherlands (B223, 1950) which shows a child gazing at a flying butterfly. It is to be assumed, of course, that the child is an embryo lepidopterist.

For less than ten dollars, the collector can assemble a colorful collection of all the Lepidoptera of the world—that is, all species that have been portrayed on stamps. Most of them can be obtained from any stamp dealer, particularly one who specialized in topical stamps.

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