

Entomophilately / Beetlephilately

by Patrice BONAFONTE

Philately and entomology are both great and multifaceted fields of study. For those with a dual entomological and philatelic bent, combining the two occupations into "entomophilately" can be a very rewarding and educational fiddle. However, what can be included in a short treatment of the subject?

Obviously, insects have been around much longer than postage stamps, but both have been reviled and revered by mankind. I decided to focus specifically on beetle stamps.

Before I do, however, I would like to say a few words about the insect stamps and the thematic stamp collection.

If you browse through the pages of a stamp catalog, it quickly becomes apparent that insects (and especially butterflies!) are a popular theme. Almost all countries have issued stamps depicting insects (even if it is in a purely commercial way, with the main target being thematic collectors, and too often without any relation to the species living in these same countries).

The first insect stamp was issued in 1891 by Nicaragua and represents a beehive being part of a scene symbolizing productivity and fertility. The first beetle on a stamp was the lucanus *Chiasognathus grantii*, issued in 1948 by Chile in a series honoring the French naturalist Claude GAY. This series also included a mantis (*Mantis gayi*) and a butterfly (*Castnia eudesmia*).



Why beetles? Entomologist by training, entomologist by profession, then reconverted into a technical designer-editor of computer books for a large French manufacturer, but still an entomologist as an amateur, I collected stamps like this and like that until I came across this 1954 series from Hungary which made me switch to collecting beetles stamps.



And why a website? The first motivation was to publish a mancolist, which the Internet users could fill little by little. I was first hosted on Valérie Chansigaud's website, who had the same concerns as me. Valérie being more and more busy with her different occupations (her thesis at the time), I decided to launch myself. A little tour on the web quickly showed me that there was no site dedicated exclusively to this collection. Butterflies, bees, malaria were the main subjects of entomophilatelic sites. A desire to share and a virtual collection a little more economical than a real collection (one not preventing the other) pushed me to start. The creation of the site also allowed me to familiarize myself with the html language and with sql for the management of my online database. It also allowed me to make many contacts with entomophilatelists from all over the world, starting with Darren Pollock who corrected the English version, Don Wright from the ATA (American Topical Association), and the AFPT (Association Française de Philatélie Thématique) who published this site in its thematic bulletins.

The site map: a presentation of the main families with stamps illustrating them, a didactic part on the economic and cultural interest of beetles (ladybugs and Colorado beetles, sacred beetle, lucanus painted by Dürer are all represented on stamps), and finally a list by country showing all the beetle stamps issued by these countries.

Just a small example of the interest, which is quite different from lining up thumbnails:

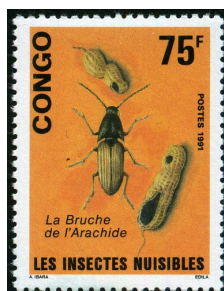
The Mauritania stamp (1969) shows *Chilocorus bipustulatus* used to control the date palm scale *Parlatoria blanchardi*. The one from Turkey (1980) shows *Rodalia cardinalis*, used to control the mealybug *Icerya purchasi*, on citrus among others.



What about the scientific aspect in all this? Beyond the countries choosing unrelated species, it is often interesting to see local representatives of their fauna. It is also often necessary to check the name of the represented species. If sometimes we are at the limit of the ridiculous, it is also often necessary to make thorough researches, and it is there that Internet is invaluable because we have quickly contacts with correspondents interested by the subject.

Some small examples:

A 1991 series from the People's Republic of Congo wants to show us local insects. Besides a Dynast and a Goliath, two other stamps show (or rather, are supposed to show) the groundnut bruchid and the coffee berry borer:



that is to say a magnificent Elateridae and a no less beautiful Cerambycidae (*Prionus*), cheerfully pumped from the book "The Great Encyclopedia of Insects", by Jiri Zahradnik and Milan Chvala, 1989, Gründ.



Antennes de la femelle (à et du mâle) de *Prionus coriarius* (Cerambycidae).

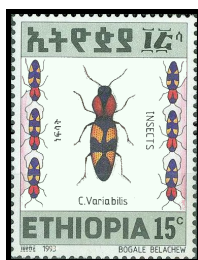
1 Prion tanneur
Prionus coriarius L.
Cerambycidae

Comme la suivante, cette espèce fait partie de la petite sous-famille des *Prioninae*, formée d'insectes assez grands, massifs, brun à brun noirâtre. *P. coriarius* mesure de 18 à 45 mm de long. Ce Coleoptère vit dans les peuplements âgés d'arbres à feuilles caduques ou mixtes, en plaine et en basse montagne. L'image apparaît surtout en juillet-août et parfois jusqu'en septembre. De jour il se cache sous l'écorce des souches ou sous les arbres couchés par terre et ne devient actif que le soir ou la nuit. Il stridule en frottant la face interne de ses fémurs postérieurs contre

Systematics is sometimes completely revisited. Example with this stamp (it is true that it was part of a series including five reptiles, a mantis and...this :



Sometimes it gets more complicated. The next stamp took us about five years to come up with a name. The three of us: Don Wright, head of entomology at the ATA (American Topical Association) and editor of the insect catalogs, Jose Reis (co-editor of the ATA monthly Entomophilately Bulletin) and myself defined the C. of *C. variabilis* (that's *Cardiophorus*).



Most recently, it was the next stamp Jose and I "worked on" that still remains undetermined as to the species (the genus is of course *Manticora*). It is part of a set of four stamps issued in 2019 on Kalahari desert insects, but there are four species in Botswana and verifying the edeage on the stamp is tricky, especially since it is probably a female! We sent an inquiry to the Botswana postal service, but no answer until today...



Stamps have been issued to commemorate useful insect species, to educate us about pest control, to draw attention to the need to protect endangered species, or simply to depict the amazing and varied shapes and colors of insects. I find collecting insect stamps (and more specifically beetle stamps, which is my theme) a very rewarding passion, and I continue to be amazed by the number and variety of these stamps.

I can only encourage young entomologists who are gnawing their teeth in winter because there is not much left to see in the way of insects in nature to extend their passion at a lower cost (and without defaulting) by collecting insect stamps. They can be interested in already very collected groups for which they will easily find help and material, but it would be much more interesting and rewarding to start collecting Hemiptera or Diptera stamps where practically nothing is done yet.

And in the long run, they may be asked to have their site listed on other sites, or even to illustrate certain journals, as for example in the OPIE journal *Insectes* number 153 (2009-2):

UN INSECTE à la page



Représentations philatéliques du Rhinocéros du cocotier. Collection F Bonafant en ligne à panice.bonafantia.free.fr/cocotier/

Par Alain Fraval

Le Rhinocéros du cocotier chanteur discret

L'adulte, de 3 à 4 cm de long, est brun foncé brillant ; le mâle se distingue par sa corne. Les imagos volent à la tombée de la nuit à la recherche d'un site d'alimentation, dans la couronne du palmier. Ils s'y enfoncent et attaquent une ébauche foliaire, qu'ils ne dévorent pas mais qu'ils mâchonnent pour en extraire le jus : des attaques répétées ou multiples peuvent ruiner l'arbre. La femelle pond dans la matière végétale en décomposition. La larve – ver blanc – évolue (3 stades) dans ce milieu et, au bout de 2 à plusieurs mois, se nymphose dans une logette. L'imago, qui émerge au bout d'une vingtaine de jours, ne creusera vers sa sortie qu'à l'issue d'une période ténérale de même durée.

Le Rhinocéros du cocotier passe donc la majeure partie de sa vie caché. Sa détection, nécessaire pour entreprendre un traitement ou abattre l'arbre, est très laborieuse et surtout indirecte : les feuilles une fois développées apparaissent découpées en dentelle. La méthode visuelle reste cependant la plus employée à Guam bien qu'on dispose pour le piéger de la phéromone d'agrégation de l'espèce, l'oryctalure (ethyl 4-methyloctanoate).

Cette espèce, comme d'autres scarabées, stridule à tous les stades : les imagos lors du rapprochement des sexes et de combats entre mâles, les larves lorsqu'elles sont dérangées. D'où l'idée d'analyser ces sons pour évaluer leur intérêt en

détection acoustique du ravageur. Les stridulations ont été enregistrées au laboratoire dans des cages peuplées de plusieurs individus et pourvues en feuilles tendres et morceaux de stipe (imagos) ou de bois altéré (larves). Le capteur est soit un accéléromètre lié à un barreau métallique planté dans le substrat, soit le microphone d'un enregistreur MP3 (ce dernier utilisé sur le terrain, fixé à la base du stipe). Les ébranlements et sons recueillis, amplifiés puis analysés avec toute une panoplie de logiciels, mettent en évidence des séries régulières de gazouillis (« chirps ») spécifiques et distincts des bruits annexes non discriminants (mandibules, corps, pattes...).

Il semble donc que muni d'un capteur acoustique un opérateur à l'oreille entraînée – assisté éventuellement par un logiciel de reconnaissance – puisse repérer sans erreur chaque cocotier infesté dès le début de l'attaque. Un grand pas vers la maîtrise du Rhinocéros, disent les auteurs de ce travail.

À La Réunion, depuis 2004, on protège les palmiers globalement et préventivement contre la « Bé-bête coco » en disposant des pièges à eau appâtés à l'oryctalure (4 par hectare). En complément ou en substitut de ce piégeage de masse, on pourrait envisager une lutte microbologique, par *Rhabdionvirus oryctes*, introduit avec un certain succès à Wallis en 1970. ■

Actu repérée via « La chasse au scarabée rhinocéros est ouverte ». *Bulletin électronique États-Unis* 163, 23 avril 2005, en ligne à www.bulletins-electroniques.com/actualites/58770.htm

INSECTES 16 n°153 - 2009 (2)

Bibliography

Thematic stamp catalog DOMFIL, 1996. Butterflies and other Insects (24th edition), Sabadell, Spain.
HAMEL, D.R., 1991. Atlas of Insects on Stamps of the World. Tico Press, Falls Church, VA, USA.
WRIGHT, D.P., Jr. 1993. Insects on Stamps of the World. American Topical Association Handbook No. 123.
WRIGHT, D.P., Jr. 2014. Insects on Stamps Vol. IV No. 164. A digital version on CD ROM is also available.
Bulletins Faune, then Faune et Flore of the French Association of Thematic Philately

Internet links

Charity begins at home, here is my personal site on Beetle stamps:

<http://patrice.bonafonte.free.fr/coleos/>

This site includes the complete list of all beetle stamps in various downloadable formats (text, Excel, pdf).



<http://www.biophilately.org/archive.html>
(archives on ATA bulletin, about a year late)

New products:

<http://www.bombaystamps.com/lists.asp>

<https://www.igpc.com/thumbs.cfm>

<https://findyourstampsvalue.com/news/tags/insect-and-butterfly-stamps>

Catalogs :

<https://www.stampworld.com/en/>

<https://colnect.com/en/stamps/years/theme/591-Beetles>

Auction sites :

<https://www.ebay.fr/>

<https://www.delcampe.net/fr/collections/>

In addition to these specialized sites, many other sites, entomological or philatelic, present some stamps of insects.