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Entomophilately: Exploring Insect Diversity Through the Art of Stamps

G Balraj*[1], Sandeep K[2], G.M. Imran[3], Krishna Kumar Bonkuri[4] and Kamsali Pruthvi Raju[5]

Abstract: -

Stamp collecting, or philately, is a globally cherished hobby that captures history, culture, and biodiversity through miniature works of art. Among the vast array of themes explored on stamps, insects have emerged as a prominent and visually compelling subject due to their ecological importance, economic relevance, and striking diversity. The subfield of entomophilately the study and collection of insect-themed stamps highlights how various insect orders have been represented philatelically since the late 19th century. This paper explores the development of entomophilately and provides a detailed overview of key insect orders featured on stamps, including Coleoptera, Lepidoptera, Hymenoptera, and Orthoptera. With butterflies dominating insect depictions, followed by beetles and flies, stamps serve not only as artistic and historical artifacts but also as educational tools that celebrate insect biodiversity and raise awareness about their roles in ecosystems.

Key words: Biodiversity, entomophilately, philately, thematic stamps

Introduction

In the world, stamp collecting has been one of the most popular hobbies. Their intrinsic beauty and design are probably the most significant factors and driving forces behind stamp collecting. Stamps can represent miniature works of art and also serve as modern witnesses, capturing the essence of the era in which they were released. As the postal service system expanded quickly throughout the world in the late nineteenth century, stamp

G Balraj*[1], Sandeep K[2], G.M. Imran[3], Krishna Kumar Bonkuri[4] and Kamsali Pruthvi Raju[5]

[1]Department of Entomology, N. M. College of Agriculture, Navsari Agricultural University Navsari (396 450), India

[2]Department of Entomology, Post Graduate College of Agriculture, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa (848 125), India

[3]Department of Agronomy, N. M. College of Agriculture, Navsari Agricultural University Navsari (396 450), India

[4]Department of Entomology, ICAR-National Rice Research Institute, Cuttack, Odisha (753 006), India

[5]Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi (110 012), India

collecting began. It is one area of study within the broader discipline of philately, which is defined as the study of stamps and related objects, such as essays, proofs, first-day covers, and postmarks. A key development in philately is the growing fascination of the variety of so-called "topical" or "thematical" motifs on stamps, such as birds, plants, artists, or aeroplanes (Covell, 2009). It is not unexpected that insects have long been depicted on stamps given their vital economic and ecological significance as well as their remarkable diversity and beauty. Here the term entomophilately describes the collection and study of insect-related stamps (Hamel 1990). The insect stamp was used in 1890 by Nicaragua and consisted of bee hive along plenty (Hamel 1990). It was only appeared after the end of World War II and the number of insects ring on stamps increased significantly. In most cases, aesthetically attractive species are featured, e.g., large, colorful tropical butterflies, but various stamps also focus on infamous pest species, e.g., the Anopheles mosquitos. Until 1990, about 4,600 insects were featured on stamps with butterflies representing the most published insect order by far 68.4 %, followed by beetles 9.8 %, and flies 9.1 % (Hamel 1990).

Insects featured on postal stamps:

Different countries have issued stamps showcasing various insect species from multiple insect orders, each representing unique adaptations and roles in the environment. Below is a detailed description of insects featured on postal stamps, organized by major insect orders.

1. Order: Coleoptera

Coleoptera is the largest order of insects, comprising over 400,000 described species. Beetles have hardened forewings called elytra, which protect their delicate hind wings and abdomen. Beetles have featured on nearly 1800 stamps. The first beetle on stamp was Lucanus chiasognathus grantii, issued in 1948 by Chile in a series honoring the French naturalist Claude Gay (Bonafonte,2000)

Beetles on Stamps:

a. Ladybird Beetles (Coccinellidae):

Featured for their bright red coloration and beneficial role in pest control. Countries like Germany, France, and the UK have issued stamps showcasing them.

b. Stag Beetles (Lucanidae)

Known for their large mandibles and impressive appearance, often used in European and Asian stamps.

c. Jewel Beetles (Buprestidae)

Prized for their iridescent colors; featured on stamps from countries like Japan and Thailand.

2. Order: Lepidoptera (Butterflies and Moths)

First beetle on stamp was *chiasognathus grantii* in Chile

Swallowtail butterfly in USA, 1977

Monarch Butterfly in USA, 1999

Lepidoptera includes over 180,000 species, known for their scaled wings. Butterflies are often diurnal, while moths are typically nocturnal. Nearly 14105 stamp issues have featured lepidopterans. Despite of their dominance only 2% of lepidoptera species have been represented on stamps.

Lepidopterans on Stamps:

a. Monarch Butterfly

A symbol of transformation, migration, and conservation; frequently appears on U.S., Canadian, and Mexican stamps.

b. Luna Moth

With its ethereal green wings and long tails, it has been highlighted on North American stamps

3. Order: Hymenoptera

This order includes social and solitary insects important for pollination, pest control, and ecosystem engineering.

Hymenopterans on Stamps:

a. Honey Bee

Frequently shown on stamps from all over the world due to its importance in agriculture and symbolism of industriousness.

b. Bumblebee

Known for its fuzzy body and buzzing sound; popular in Russia in 2005 and Scandinavian stamp issues.

c. Ants

Sometimes illustrated for their complex colonies and teamwork, featured in stamps from tropical regions like Brazil and India.

Dipterans on Stamps:

Hoverflies (Syrphidae)

- Beneficial insects for pollination, often misidentified as bees; featured on educational stamps.

Tsetse Fly (Glossina spp.)

- Known for transmitting sleeping sickness; used on African stamps to raise awareness about vector-borne diseases.

Mosquitoes (Culicidae)

- Featured on health-themed stamps, particularly for malaria and dengue awareness campaigns.

Bombus armeniacus

Bombus fragrans

Bombus unicus

4. Order: Orthoptera (Grasshoppers, Crickets, Katydids)

Orthopterans are recognized by their long hind legs adapted for jumping and their ability to produce sounds (stridulation).

Orthopterans on Stamps:

Field Cricket (Gryllus spp.)

- Known for their nighttime chirping; featured in stamps emphasizing traditional Asian poetry and music.

Grasshoppers (Acrididae)

- Symbolizing nature and agriculture, they are found on stamps from countries with strong rural heritage, like African and South American nations.

5. Order: Diptera (Flies, Mosquitoes)

Diptera have only one pair of wings and are known for their diversity, including both beneficial pollinators and disease vectors.

6. Order: Hemiptera (True Bugs)

Hemipterans are characterized by piercing-sucking mouthparts. They include both beneficial and pest species.

Hemipterans on Stamps:

Cicadas (Cicadidae)

- Known for their loud calls and long life cycles; shown on Japanese and Chinese stamps.

Aphids (Aphididae)

- Sometimes included in ecological themes showing pest-natural enemy interactions.

Assassin Bugs (Reduviidae)

- Predatory insects shown on stamps that highlight biodiversity.

7. Order: Odonata (Dragonflies and Damselflies)

Odonates are ancient insects with excellent flying abilities and large compound eyes.

Odonates on Stamps:

Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*)

- A widely distributed dragonfly, often used in European nature-themed stamps.

Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma* spp.)

Known for its delicate body and shimmering wings; featured on stamps in countries like Sweden and Australia.

Thailand, 1989

Australia, 2017

Liechtenstein, 2020

Conclusion:

Insects have long captured the fascination of philatelists and naturalists alike, making their way into stamp collections around the world. Their appearance on stamps spans both aesthetic and educational dimensions ranging from the vibrant beauty of butterflies to the ecological significance of bees and ants. The increasing presence of insect motifs since the mid-20th century reflects not only their visual appeal but also growing public awareness of their importance to agriculture, pollination, pest control, and biodiversity. Entomophilately serves as a unique intersection of science, art, and culture, offering a platform through which global postal systems can honor the invaluable contributions of insects.

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