

Map stamps of the Galápagos Islands - Roger Kirby

Approximately one third of the postage stamps of the Galápagos Islands issued up until 2012 have been map stamps. This is a much higher proportion that is usual for any country but there are special circumstances, particularly the natural heritage of the islands leading to its recent tourist industry. As well as maps, the features that dominate on postage stamps sent from the islands are the local scenery, flora, and fauna. But because the Galápagos Islands is a province of Ecuador rather than an independent country, all stamps, with a small exception in the 1950s, have carried the country label Ecuador.

The Galápagos Archipelago is a group of 13 islands and 19 islets totalling 8,000 sq. km in the Pacific Ocean about 960 km west of Ecuador and straddling the Equator. The islands had no indigenous population but by 2012 had a resident population of almost 27,000, swollen by about 100,000 visitors each year. Designated a National Park in 1959 and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, the islands and surrounding marine habitats now suffer severe environmental threats.

Ecuador annexed the Galápagos Islands in 1832. The first map stamps of the islands were prepared by Ecuador for its 'Archipiélago de Colón', a set of six stamps of the same map design. This set was unissued and its date of production is uncertain. Bill Newport, in Dodd (1991), advises that the map series was produced around 1916 by an Ecuadorian diplomat named Pallaras but who was unable to get the necessary Presidential decree to authorise their issue. The catalogue entry by Olivier Bertossa (1994, updated 2007) lists the stamps as unissued but gives the date as 1922 and the label 'Centenario de Galápagos'. As we know that the centenary was in 1932, either the date or the label in Bertossa's catalogue is incorrect.

Whatever the truth, the stamps from this unissued set are of poor cartographic design which may help to explain why they were not issued: each is printed in one colour only and the islands are masked by heavy shading. The examples illustrated are the 2c. carmine



Fig. 1 The pair of stamps one unissued, one used. Ecuador, Bertossa catalogue XX, XXII.

(Bertossa, XX) and the 10c. grey brown (Bertossa, XXII), the latter being used. Williams (1970) states that a small quantity from this unissued set were put into circulation and some are known with genuine Quito cancellations of 1942. Roche (2013) states that used copies are very scarce.

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) visited the Galápagos Islands for five weeks between September and October 1835 as a young geologist and naturalist on HMS Beagle. His observations on the fauna and the species diversity between the islands were the basis of his later writings and fame (Darwin, 1839). The anniversaries of Darwin's visit and of his birth have been widely commemorated on many map stamps. The first such stamp was issued by Ecuador in 1936 to mark the 1835 visit. The 2c. black (illustrated, S.G. 519) is the only map stamp in a commemorative set



Fig. 2 Ecuador S.G. 519.

of six stamps. It shows the distribution and names of the larger islands better than do most map stamps in later issues.

Before the Galápagos tourist industry developed from the 1960s and well before the islands were adopted as a province of Ecuador, the organisation of mail from the islands was somewhat informal. As an example, the stampless cover front (illustrated) addressed to the Norwegian consul in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, also carries the note, in translation, "Letter from San Cristobal, Galápagos, does not require the use of stamps." The cover reverse carries an undated strike of San Cristobal and good arrival circular date stamps for December 6, 1956.



Fig. 3 Stampless cover.

Only seven stamps in total are listed in the Stanley Gibbons catalogue as a separate entry under the Galápagos Islands label. Of these, six stamps were issued in 1957 as a set (S.G. 1-6) including two

map stamps (S.G. 2 and S.G. 5). The set commemorated the 125th anniversary of the annexation of the islands in 1832. The 50c.violet map stamp (S.G. 2) is shown here on part of an unaddressed air mail cover tied by a 'tortoise' circular date stamp for 1957 in green and a map of Santa Cruz island. It is clear on the stamp itself that the islands are drawn too close to the South American mainland. Such cartographic licence on map stamps is not uncommon.



Fig. 4 Ecuador, Galapagos Islands S.G. 2.

The 1957 set was reissued in 1961 by Ecuador to commemorate jointly the opening of the marine biology station and the 15th anniversary of UNESCO. On the stamps the ISLAS GALAPAGOS label has been overprinted and the UNESCO emblem and text for the marine biology station has been added. The 1s.80c. purple map stamp (illustrated, S.G. 1211) is the reissue of S.G. 5 from the 1957 set. The larger islands are named and their topography is shown by contours.



Fig. 5 Ecuador S.G. 1211.

The last of the seven stamps issued under the Galapagos Islands label was an air mail triangular stamp to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations Organisation. The 2s. olive green stamp (illustrated, S.G. 7) features hands reaching upwards to the official UNO map symbol. As the date listed for S.G. 7 is 1957, two years after the 10th anni-

versary in 1955, its issue was very late, perhaps an afterthought. Moreover, Ecuador had already issued a UNO air mail stamp in 1956 in the same triangular design carrying the dates 1945-1955, a 1s.70c. stamp in red (illustrated, S.G. 1077).



Fig. 6 Galapagos S.G.7, Ecuador S.G. 1077.

In 1969 Ecuador issued a set of twelve revenue stamps, all originally 30c.values, surcharged for postal purposes with values from 20c. to 5s. These Ecuadorian map stamps include the Galapagos Islands as a tiny and barely visible corner inset obscured by the RESELLO overprint on all 12 values. The S.2 value (illustrated, S.G. 1372) is typical. It is here shown on a souvenir cover from about 1970 which provides another facet of the postal history of the Galapagos Islands. Planning restrictions have always curtailed accommodation on the islands so that most visitors are accommodated overnight on board the many tourist boats from the mainland. The souvenir cover carries a cachet on reverse "Mailed at sea aboard SS Monterey, Matson Lines".

When the Galapagos Islands became a province of Ecuador in 1973, the event was marked by a stamp set of the local fauna (Ecuador, S.G. 1524-31) that did not include a single map. Thereafter until well into the 21st century, the dominant themes of all stamps of the islands have been flora, fauna, and marine views, without maps. In this period, only in the anniversary year 1985 were map stamps issued. The year 1985 was a triple anniversary: the 450th anniversary of the discovery of the islands, credited to Bishop Tomás de Berlanga in 1535; the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's visit; and the 25th anniversary (in 1984) of the Charles Darwin foundation. The stamps for this triple anniversary were issued by Ecuador in 1986 and comprise a set of seven mainly birds and animals with one map stamp, the s.200 value showing Bishop Tomás and a map (illustrated, S.G. 1976); and a mini-sheet block of 4 stamps of the islands in composite design (illustrated, S.G. MS1977) with the islands unnamed but their topography in layer tinting.



Fig. 8 Ecuador S.G. 1976.

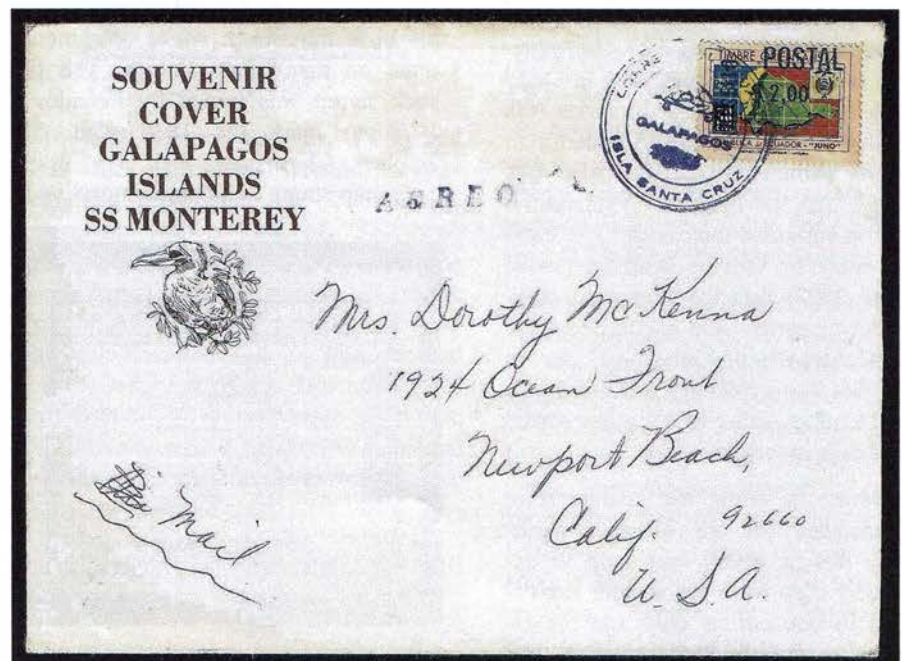


Fig. 7 Ecuador S.G. 1372.



Fig. 9 Ecuador S.G. MS 1977.

Chronologically there follows a map-free gap of two decades until 2007 when Ecuador issued a simple pictorial set of four animals/birds stamps each with an inset map of the islands (S.G. 3025-28). The US\$0.40 value (*illustrated*, S.G. 3025) features a sea turtle. The Ecuador monetary unit changed from the sucre to the US dollar in 2000.



Fig. 10 Ecuador S.G. 3025.

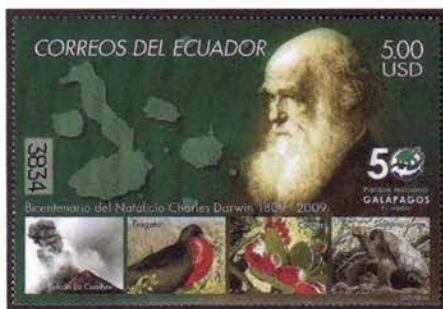


Fig. 11 Ecuador S.G. 3146.

The bicentenary in 2009 of the birth of Charles Darwin was recorded by commemorative issues by both Ecuador and Great Britain. The large Ecuador stamp (*illustrated*, S.G. 3146) also marks the 50th anniversary of the Galápagos National Park. The Great Britain mini-sheet block of four stamps in composite design concentrates on Darwin (*illustrated*, S.G. MS2904). No picture of the great man is shown but the cartographic design includes a fine red line

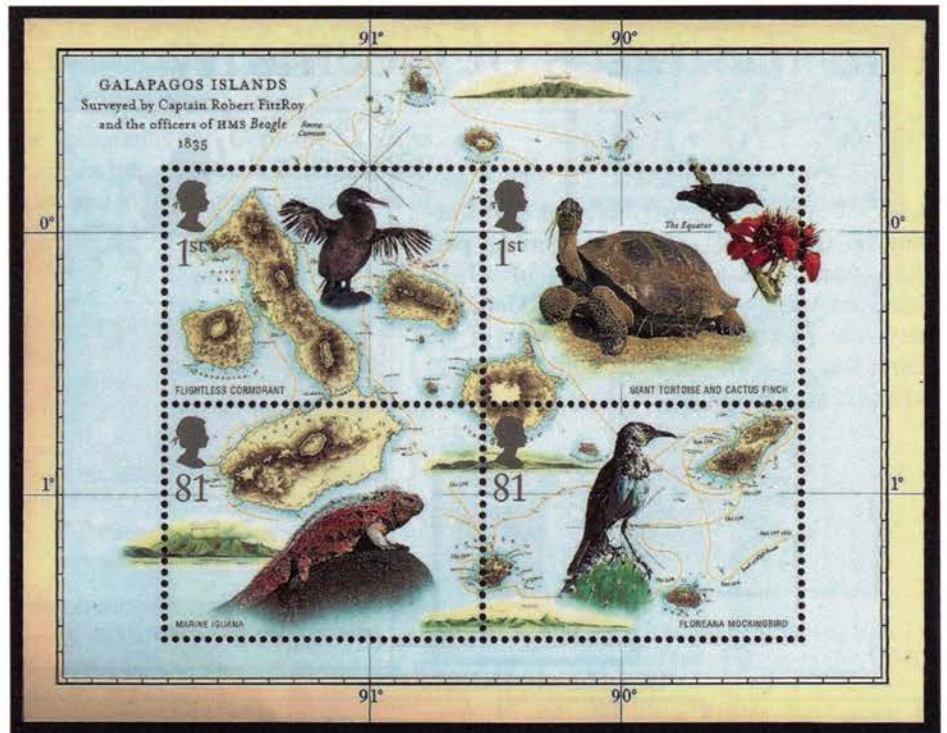


Fig. 12 Great Britain S.G. 2904.

which is the dated track of HMS Beagle in 1835. The design also includes a selection of Galápagos fauna and the best cartographic representation of the islands on stamps so far produced. The same GB stamps were also issued separately.

With no further opportunity to celebrate anniversaries in the near future, the stamps since 2009 have reverted to simple pictorials. Where maps are included at all, they show just the inhabited islands, reduced to the basics to become unnamed black silhouettes, superimposed on a picture. A typical example is the set Tourism: diversity of Ecuador. The US\$3 map stamp of 2011 (*illustrated*, S.G. unnumbered) Fig. 13 shows a Galápagos fur seal. Similarly in 2011, a booklet and a mini-sheet were issued, each of eight self-adhesive stamps in 4 x 2 blocks, showing animals and birds with a few islands in silhouette on each stamp (*not illustrated*).



Fig. 13 Ecuador, Fur Seal.

These recent issues have increased the quantity but not the quality of map stamps of the islands.

In summary, the map stamps of the Galápagos Islands form an interesting, if variable, collection, reflecting its postal history as this international tourist centre has developed and as the significance of Charles Darwin's visit in 1835 has been increasingly recognised. ■

References

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- L. N. and M. Williams (1970) *Cinderella stamps*. 160 pp. Heinemann, London.
- CV The author is a retired academic cartographer residing in Scotland, UK. He collects mostly historic map stamps but not blank global networks.