

118. British Wildlife, 1977

Some of Britain's best loved wild animals appeared on the five 9p stamps issued by the Post Office on 5 October 1977 with the aim of making children and adults more aware of the nation's wildlife heritage and the need to protect and preserve it. Each stamp pictures a different animal — hedgehog, brown hare, red squirrel, otter and badger — depicted in its natural environment and posture. The stamps were a 'first' for Patrick Oxenham, who has spent a lifetime studying and drawing animals, and has become one of Britain's leading and best known animal and wildlife artists.

The hedgehog, *Erinaceus europaeus*, is a friendly little fellow, fearless and well protected by its spiny coat. In the garden it consumes a large number of harmful insects and destructive slugs and snails. Regrettably more hedgehogs are killed on our roads than by their natural enemies, badgers and foxes. The brown hare, *Lepus capensis*, is one of the two kinds of hare native to Britain, and is widely distributed in lowland regions. Hares are distinguishable from rabbits by their long ears and hind-legs, also by the divided upper lip — hence the term 'hare-lip' for this defect in humans. They occupy 'forms' or shallow scrapes in a pasture and do not burrow: here the young hares or leverets are born with great frequency throughout the year. The blue or mountain hare is a highland animal, stockier than the brown hare and confined to the uplands of northern England, Wales and Scotland.

The red squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*, is a creature of the coniferous forest which also lives in deciduous

woods, especially young beech plantations. It is not now common in England, although it has been reintroduced in Scotland and now flourishes there in large numbers. Its relative, the grey squirrel, a species introduced from North America, has spread rapidly in Britain and has a voracious appetite for the buds and bark of trees, seeds, fruit, nuts and fungi. Compared to the bright fur and bushy tail of the 'red' squirrel, the 'grey' is a drab, but equally lively, animal.

The otter, *Lutra lutra*, is an aquatic mammal about three feet in length with webbed feet and a thick, powerful tail. During the last 50 years it has declined in numbers and is missing from many of its former haunts, due to the disturbance and pollution of our waterways, and not the least to indefatigable and vicious hunting for 'sport', a fate which has also threatened the wild mink. Otters are now protected in England. The badger, *Meles meles*, is one of the most popular of British mammals — it is nocturnal and lives in underground setts or burrows, generally in woodland amidst bracken and shrubs, where its home consists of a complex of passages and chambers with numerous entrances and exits. The common badger is greyish brown on the back and black below, while the head is white with dark lines on the side, muzzle pointed, length about 2 to 2 feet 6 inches. Badgers are now protected under the Act of 1973, but their alleged links with the spread of bovine tuberculosis in cattle has necessitated some eradication of these mammals in parts of the country.

The stamps were printed in sheets of 100 (two



panes of 50, 5 X 10) on unwatermarked paper with 'all-over' phosphor, the five stamps being arranged together in horizontal *se-tenant* strips throughout the sheet. Listed varieties include the 'extra berry' behind the squirrel's left ear and a short curved line below the nut in his paws; shortened whiskers on the otter's left cheek, a broken 'e' in 'Otter' and a superfluous hyphen between 'Otter' and 'Lutra'. The quantity issued was 61,420,000 of each denomination.

JAMES WATSON

New Stamp Books

'Social Letter Writing' Discount Stamp Book

The Post Office will issue a new discount stamp book in the Social Letter Writing series on 5 March 1985. It will remain on general sale until 6 April 1985 at all post offices in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and until 8 April 1985 at post offices in Scotland, unless stocks are previously exhausted. Containing 10 x 17p definitive stamps, on the reverse side of which will be printed in non-toxic ink, the letter 'D', the cost of the book will be £1.55.

Because of the anticipated demand for these books, sales will be restricted to two per customer at all post offices including philatelic counters. At the British Philatelic Bureau, orders for more than two books will be dealt with on a first come first served basis.

From 9 April a £1.70 stamp book containing 10 x 17p definitive stamps will be available. It will include a special offer for letter writing material. Both books are designed by George Hardie.

The 17p stamps contained in the £1.55 and £1.70 books are printed on phosphor coated paper.

Illustrated Stamp Book Covers

On 23 April 1985 three new stamp books, values

50p, £1.30 and £1.54 will be issued. The 50p and £1.30 books are third in the present series of books with illustrated covers. The 50p book designed by Peter Morter depicts the orchids 'Bifrenaria' and 'Vanda Tricolour'. The £1.30 book illustrating trams, features a Blackpool Tram, car number 717, is designed by John Thirsk and contains 10 x 13p definitive stamps. The £1.54 book, number 13, designed by John Gibbs, continues with the Postal History theme illustrating surface printed stamps produced by Thomas De La Rue and Co, and contains 4 x 13p and 6 x 17p definitive stamps.

The books are available initially only from philatelic counters and the British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH, EH3 5TT. They become available from post offices or vending machines as stocks of the existing books run out.

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Both the stamps and booklet covers are printed by Harrison & Sons (High Wycombe) Ltd; the stamps in photogravure on the Chambon press and the covers on the Libra bookmaking machine.

The stamps in the 50p book are printed in one format only with one 1p stamp above three 13p stamps on the right hand side and two 1p stamps above the two 4p stamps on the left hand side of the page. Each stamp in the 50p book will be printed with a single phosphor bar.

The 13p stamps in the £1.30 tram book will bear a single central phosphor bar.

In the postal history book the 17p stamps will bear two phosphor bars and the 13p stamps will have a single side phosphor bar. The layout will be five 17p stamps above one 17p and four 13p stamps.

Cylinder numbers of the stamps will appear periodically on all three books, that is on every eighth book for 50p stamp vended books and every sixth book for counter books.

All books, except the 50p machine vended book, appear with both left and right hand formats.

Post Office Stampex Trophy

We would like to congratulate Mr J S Hanson of Whimple, Devon, the winner of the 1985 Post Office Stampex trophy with an exhibit entitled 'The 1d value of King George V 1911-1924'. Mr Hanson was also the winner of a gold medal.

