

Illegal Philatelic Issues in the Name of the Republic of Rwanda, Depicting Sri Lankan Snake Images

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The Republic of Rwanda, a landlocked country in east-central Africa, is bordered by Uganda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Tanzania. The first philatelic materials known from the country were from German East Africa, until after World War II and conquest by Belgium. Postal usage of stamps indicated as from Ruanda-Urundi were then issued, up to the time of independence in 1961.

On 1 April 2003 (also, All Fool's Day), an unknown agency, probably based in eastern Europe, produced a series of two labels, purportedly to be philatelic in nature, in the name of the Republic of Rwanda. They exclusively depict species of snakes found in Sri Lanka, images of which have been used without permission from watercolors executed by the third author of this note. With the exception of one image, these were published in a folio volume by the second author (de Silva 2009), the images previously available at the third author's personal website.

The contents of the series include a miniature sheet and a souvenir sheet. The first item (Fig. 1) comprises a single label, the miniature sheet measuring 99 x 94 mm, the label itself, 51 x 44 mm, and depicts the Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper, *Trimeresurus trionocephalus*, with a face value of 500 Rwandan Francs. On the bottom of the sheet are the words "The Wildlife Trusts", and a matching logo of the Wildlife

Trusts, showing the European Badger, *Meles meles*. The borders of the sheet show a xanthic *Boa constrictor*.

The souvenir sheet (Fig. 2) measures 137 x 109 mm, and comprises six labels, each measuring 38 x 43 mm, and features six species of snakes. The face values shown are 100 Rwandan Francs for the three stamps printed in the left column (showing *Dryocalamus nympha*, *Trimeresurus trionocephalus*, and *Aspidura trachyprocta*) and 200 Rwandan Francs for the three stamps in the right column (featuring *Xenochrophis piscator*, *Hypnale hypnale*, and *Lycodon striatus*). Of these, only the image of *T. trionocephalus* was not illustrated in de Silva (2009) but was printed earlier, in Jinasena's (1998) portfolio of snake paintings. Additionally, the images of *D. nympha*, *X. piscator*, and *H. hypnale* have been printed inverted, while the image of *A. trachyprocta* has been printed upside down. On the top of the souvenir sheet are the words "The Wildlife Trusts" and the same logo, and at the bottom are the words, "Protect Mother Earth". Additionally, the souvenir sheet is adorned with half-tones of numerous, and partial images of snakes in the form of a collage on the left and right margins of the sheet, that are also the work of Jinasena, the artist; all these were printed in the work of de Silva (2009). These images are as follows: left margin, top to bottom: *Oligodon sublineatus*, *Lycodon aulicus*, *Amphiesma stolatum*, and *Coelognathus hel-*