

To Learn Classification — Collect Stamps

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If you attempt to memorize the Latin labels for Order, Family, Genus and Species has resulted in a load of “learned lumber” in your head, not easily extracted for useful application, try learning classification via stamp collecting.

By the time you identify that long-necked bird on a stamp from Burundi — for example — as *Anhinga rufa* the African Darter, and mount it on an album page under Genus *Anhinga*, Family *Anhingidae*, Order *Pelecaniformes*, you will have learned both terms and relationships you’re not likely to forget. It’s also fun to know that *anhinga* is from the Tupi language of Brazil, used for this African bird because its American congener was listed long before any Old World relative.

The family labels are formed, according to scientific rule, by adding the Latin ending *-idae* to the name of the most prominent genus in the group, usually the first one recorded. The names of the orders are coined by adding *-iformes*. The genus label is also the basic word to know because it stands first in each bird’s worldwide scientific label, followed by the word that names the species.

Often this Latin binomial is imprinted on the stamp, with or without a name in the local language. If that Latin label is missing and you can’t read the vernacular, track it down in *Birds of the World on Stamps* by Willard F. Stanley, just published at \$6 by the American Topical Association (3306 N. 50th St. Milwaukee, Wis. 53216). All birds on stamps issued through 1972 are listed by Stanley by both country and Latin label. Another \$5 brings you the Association’s *Bio-Philately Journal*, with listings of current stamps on wildlife themes.

There is no ready-made album for stamp collections only of birds, so how much you spend for a loose-leaf notebook is up to you, and mounting hinges (so you can remove stamps without tearing) are inexpensive. If you don’t go in for rarities you can get 300 bird stamps for under \$10 and smaller packets can be had from a dime to a dollar. However, no one packet is likely to have a representative stamp for each of the world’s 27 orders and 166 families, so you’ll have to shop around with local or mail-order dealers to make your classification key complete.

But the hunt is half the fun, whether your quarry is a bird in the bush or on a stamp, just another fascinating facet to the ornithologist’s lore.



African Darter, *Anhinga rufa*, on a stamp from Burundi.



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