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FASCINATED IN FEATHERS – HOW BIRDS INSPIRE PEOPLE

(Synopsis)

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Bird tracks which can be found in the culture of mankind reflect experiences and events in the observation in open nature. Therefore, the exhibit draws a double perspective: Firstly, the focus is on the perceiving person with his world view, his aesthetic sensibility and his culinary and social needs. Secondly, the focus is on the bird as a part of a nature which is reliant on the active help of mankind.

Philatelic and thematic aim of the exhibit

The aim of the exhibit is to entertain philatelists, ranging from specialized bird stamp collectors to the general audience at international exhibitions. The way the story is told should primarily address thematic collectors, the selection of material is also to attract philatelists of the other fields. A narrative storyline encourages a sequential study of the exhibit. However, subchapters and even single pages are designed in a way that the combination of text and material allows for understanding sections picked out for whatever reason.

The chosen theme allows for a presentation of material of highest importance, both in general philately and in the theme of ornithology. Hence, the exhibit presents core material of several traditional philately, postal history, aero-philately and postal stationery collecting areas. By the same time, it aims to show an unrivalled selection from the thematic core items of bird philately, some of them being unique and shown for the first time in a thematic context.

This focus on general philatelic and specific thematic importance is supplemented by the aim of featuring the widest possible range of philatelic variety, with almost 150 different sorts of philatelic items deriving from more than 140 different issuing postal authorities. Amongst them are 83 unique pieces and a total of about 200 items with less than five copies known.

The way how the thematic story is constructed and implemented, aims to follow the most current state of development of thematic philately. As a novel step, the exhibit develops subchapters in full lines of three (or six) pages, driving the narrative approach to the next level. Of course, a high degree of consistence within every page is observed, but both, texts and page layout facilitate a continuing flow of the story.

The architecture of the plan

The story is told in six chapters. Each chapter comprises one full frame, except of chapters 2 and 5 which are the core chapters so that two frames each are devoted to them.

The concept of the story can be perceived in two ways, first as a linear red thread and second as a structure of a two level symmetry.

The linear structure starts with the naïve view onto human civilization and culture: Bird tracks can be found in many ways, and a three-by-three selection of nine aspects reveals the deep impact of birds in very many facets of our human civilization.

Why is such broad impact to be found? Chapter 2 answers this question by introducing the visitor into the fascinating world of birds, which received its systematic scientific form by naming, classifying and studying the species. Beside of the scientific interpretation, early human culture always transformed the perceived attributes of birds as facets of human personality (until the expression of sovereignty). The primary examples for this interpretation are given in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 starts with the last aspect of chapter 3, continuing the cultural integration of bird attributes into symbolism. By the same time, and as a sharp contrast between culture and civilization, man uses birds for his own purposes of food, communication and commodity. This important aspect of the theme is treated in chapter 5.

The final chapter explains how the very different recognition of birds leads to perceiving the threats for the survival of birds in the wild. It summarizes the measures for bird protection. The final subchapter mirrors the three-by-three structure of the introduction chapter, bringing the exhibit to an end with three different visions towards the future of the “fascination with feathers”.

By the same time, the structure of the exhibit resembles the principles of classical music by symmetry, contrast and harmonic flow. This is expressed in the assembly and size of the six chapters: Looking at the size of chapters (four chapters of one frame and two chapters of two frames each), the chosen double form of two level symmetry is

1 2 1 / 1 2 1

meaning that both chapters 2 and 5 which form the core aspects of the exhibit are flanked by two surrounding chapters. Chapter 3 and chapter 4 are connected by a very soft transition, using the recognition of regionally typical birds (chapter 3.3) as the source of heraldic symbolism (chapter 4.1): The American Bald Eagle here serves as the perfect example. This soft connection from viewing and experiencing the birds (left side of the borderline) into acting with birds in culture and reality (right side of the central borderline) prevents the visitor from feeling a tough break. Same is intended for the connection of chapters 4 and 5, with going from cultural to profane usage of the feather.

However, a sharp break is intentionally set by the first page of chapter 5.5 focusing on the contrast between commerce and pleasure in bird keeping activities. Since this contrast is the theme of the full page, however, it feels rather like a connection when reading the pages.

Being symmetric by structure, chapter 6 (birds as their own world) is the other pole of chapter 1 (birds fully integrated with civilization), chapter 5 (usage of domesticated birds) the opposite to chapter 2 (watching and classifying birds in the wild). And chapter 4 (symbolic manifestation in products) contrasts chapter 3 (semantic manifestation in stories), but in a much softer way.

The development of the story

A narrative approach is chosen to implement the storyboard. As the first evident measure, the continuing text is directly positioned with the connected items, and thematic details about specific items are only

given when necessary and in much smaller font size. As a result, the text can be studied as a sequence with little categorical restrictions.

On higher level, each subchapter is told in three or six pages (with two necessary exceptions in chapter 5 and 6), which makes one or two complete lines (as three square pages are shown per line). The frames around a composite of three pages underline this effect. To further “glue” the three / six pages of each subchapter, page titles are only given in small fonts in the upper right corner, in order to provide a fast orientation for those busy visitors’ eyes jumping through the frames and not following the storyline. The page titles allow for such fast orientation by making the thematic choice of items of this page plausible independent of studying the full text.

Single pages develop what I would like to call “nutshell stories”: Aspects which would easily allow for several pages are summarized in a way that every single item has its very specific thematic function to enable the completeness of this story. Perfect examples for a “nutshell story” are the pages on Linné (see ch. 2.5.) or the conversation between a Bavarian Innkeeper and his French guest (ch. 6.2). You will find many such pages throughout the exhibit.

After having received comments on pages on which the positioning of the items itself tells the story, one such experimental page was included (ch. 5.5): A carrier pigeon, being released at one place finds its way home to the loft. Please feel free to check and look if you like it.

Examples for the ongoing text for entire subchapters can be found throughout the exhibit, but I would like to specially point to chapter 2.1, *a six page excursion into the world of birds*. On the idea of a 24 hours travel, this excursion summarizes the fascination of bird watching by combing thematic core material with non-bird items which underline the context of the excursion (like glasses, wake-up call, Aurora, Lookout, Sunset, Searchlight). The journey through day and night is even accomplished by the choice of the colours of the items, with the orange at dawn, blue afternoon sky and the pale colours of the night. Last but not least, the mixed-in onomatopoeic bird names illustrate the combination of viewing and listening birds during an excursion into their world.

The ongoing connectivity of narrative text crossing the borders of subchapters can be illustrated by the page just following this excursion: The Kiwi, mentioned during the night excursion on the previous page, serves as the introducing example for watching birds in zoos, well connecting the (of course nightly-black) New Zealand die proof of a 6d Kiwi stamp with the Kiwi nighthouse meter machine of the Wilhelma Zoo of Stuttgart and therefore connecting the subchapters themselves.

A number of jokes and plays with philatelic variety in thematic context make the study of the exhibit even more enjoyable. Colour omissions and shifts, perforation shifts, inverted centres and proofs of portions of the final stamps are used to underline aspects of the text. Some imaginative examples can be found in chapter 2.4 (using U.K. and Poland varieties and Czech proofs for explaining the naming of birds), but they are present in almost any frame.

For high ranging exhibits, it is very important that thematic text and philatelic items match. Therefore, material needs to be included which underlines the aspects of the story but cannot be taken directly from a motif collection of birds. Such examples are the U.S. lyre cancellation documenting the naming of the lyrebird (ch. 2.4) or the 1867 SILENT GROVE manuscript cancellation (a unique) illustrating what forests would be without birdsong (ch. 6.3).

Special knowledge (thematic)

Especially in a wide theme, in which completeness is only a matter of the main aspects but never of the material shown, the choice of items plays an important role. A good – and in this quality not repeatable - example for such choice is the selection of feather letters in chapter 2.4: The three letters show not only feathers of very different bird groups and a distinct characteristic colouring: They also demonstrate the three different types of feathers (body/breast, wing, and tail). This is most probably unique to bird philately.

Another aspect is the selection of large items like original drawings. They serve as eye-catchers and to attract the attention for a specific aspect, but they are also a possibility to show thematically significant aspects on enlarged scale, so that almost invisible details can be studied with the naked eye. One such example is the French Lapwing artwork dealing with the ringing of migratory birds (ch. 2.5).

But it is particularly the aspect of thematic key items which matters: “The” key stamp of bird collecting is the *1933 5 shilling Falkland king penguin*. It is shown on cover, and this cover seems to be the only one with this stamp which is not overfranked (in chapter 2.3 where you can read why). The first bird stamp design taken from a bird book (for the *1898 New Zealand 1 shilling Kaka/Kea stamp*) is another item of high thematic importance. The exhibit shows the only known single franking of any issue of this definitive (ch. 2.3). For zoological gardens, the key items are the *three Dresden PTPO stationery cards* shown in chapter 2.2. The most important item of bird migration and, by the same time, of scientific ornithology is *the Bavarian PTPO answer card for returning barn swallow reportings* in spring (chapter 2.5). Maybe this unique card is even the most important item in entire bird philately.

Whilst the *U.S. Kissing Doves prephilatelic fancy postmark* (ch. 3.1) and the *Semstvo negative dove cancellation* (ch. 5.5) are quite evident in their outstanding importance for bird philately, rare meter marks like the *1947 Everglades National Park meter* (ch. 6.2) require good knowledge of the specific theme: This meter featuring herons, missing in almost all bird exhibits, forms the very best thematic link between the early bird protection societies (Audubon Society founded for the protection of herons), national parks and modern bird protection. Therefore, this is a thematic key item even if “only” deriving from a meter machine.

Some thematic key items are shared with other collecting fields. For example, the Swan Knight (ch. 3.1) and the Wotan (4.2, used condition) postal stationery are also key items for the theme of opera, and the 7 Ravens and Cinderella PTPO cards (3.2) rank amongst the most important items for the topic of fairy tales.

Documented scientific aspects like Gould’s influence on Darwin’s theory (2.5) require deep thematic study and a bit of research. However, thematic knowledge is more than just bird books – it is also related with the thematic details of the philatelic material available for the theme. This can be illustrated by the deep analysis of the stamp designs. This has been documented in chapter 2.4 on the page of Thrush names, when the different stages of drawing the Rock Thrush on a Kuwait stamp was analysed.

General knowledge (philatelic)

Special care is taken for philatelic variety: Almost 150 different sorts of material, deriving from over 140 issuing authorities, cover all periods of philately. “Easy” proofs and varieties, which usually form the so-called “better material” of thematic exhibits, are almost completely left out.

Philatelic studies of highest significance are crown jewels also in thematic exhibits. “Fascinated in Feathers” includes three such studies, the Great Barrier Pigeon Mail flimsies (ch. 5.5, being core items of world airmail philately), the KORORAREKA postmarks (the key items of N.Z. postal history, ch. 5.2) and a study of some of the finest Feather letters from Sweden, Finland, and Aland (ch. 4.2). Each of this study would be the core material in the best collection of this field.

Other “compilations” of material come close to a philatelic study, for example the documentation of the different early U.S. postage privileges in chapter 1.3, using three prephilatelic letters of/to the army paymaster Mr. Swan, to the travelling postmaster Mr. Finch, and to the Washington parliament member Mr. Parrot. Other examples are the development and first day usage of the first Swiss postal stationery (ch. 6.3) or the proofs for the Kinnari issue (ch. 4.2) explaining the change in proof machines of the French Government Printers in the early 1950s.

Concise philatelic descriptions are given for those items which cannot be identified without specific knowledge. In some cases, the philatelic aspects are documented in depth. This is the case not only within the philatelic studies. Examples given here cover traditional and postal history aspects: In chapter 3.3 (black swans), the highly disputed origin of the printing ink of the rarest Western Australian stamp (6d

Golden Bronze on cover) is clarified, and the rural drop letter with a 1954 single franking is studied in detail. On another page in the same subchapter (penguins) the Tristan da Cunha Potato stamp is explained, and the background of usage of the penguin "Posted at Macquarie" polar exhibition cancellation is given. These are only examples from two pages, and many others can be found throughout the exhibit.

Philatelic choice of material

One of the aims of the exhibit is to use the opportunities given by the theme to show highly important philatelic material from different fields of philately, e.g. Traditional, Postal History, Aero-Philately and Postal Stationery. (Most of the items mentioned in this section once formed the core material of large gold and championship class exhibits in the different philatelic fields.)

Traditional: Since the heraldic eagle makes part of the theme, the famous *Double Geneva* (shown on a cover with the unusual two rosettes cancellation, ch. 1.2) could be included as well as the first naturalistic bird stamp design, the American Bald Eagle. (Chosen is one out of the two remaining *full sheets of 50 of the Wharton's U.S. Post Office Dispatch stamp*, ch. 4.1). The very first of the German Eagle stamps, the Holstein issue of 1850, is represented by exactly those two of the 18 different existing proofs elaborating the eagle in the best way and coming closest to the issued stamp. (On these examples – franking on cover, full pane and die proofs - the implemented principle of creating philatelic variety with the exhibit becomes evident).

Only one page is devoted to the Western Australian Black Swan (ch. 3.3), but the chosen items are highly significant: a) the *Western Australia no. 1* shown on a drop letter allowing for a scarce single franking of the 1d stamp. b) the *6d Golden Bronze*, being the rarest of all regular Western Australian stamps, on cover. c) the significant *1860 6d Swan die proof* for the first stamp printed locally in the colony.

To conclude the examples of important traditional material, it is to be mentioned that the popular *Basler Taube*, the first multicolour stamp and by no means the most famous bird stamp of the world, is also shown on cover.

Postal History: *All four postmarks of KORORARIKA*, the first post offices in New Zealand, are presented in one of the philatelic studies of this exhibit (5.2). This is the key material for New Zealand postal history, and amongst the covers the earliest incoming New Zealand cover can be shown which received a N.Z. postmark (the MISSENT TO KORORAREKA).

Aero-Philately: You can find *the first stamp in the world which was ever used for paying an airmail fee*. This is the 1898 first issue of Great Barrier Island pigeon post, the service connecting this New Zealand offshore island with Auckland 100 km away for a period of eight years. The finest out of the three existing flimsies with this stamp is shown in a highly significant philatelic study of this important service (ch. 5.5). The other flimsies include *the unique earliest first day cover of worldwide airmail philately* (the 6d Triangle stamp used on 11th July 1899) and *the key piece for worldwide pigeon mail*, the red 1 Shilling Marotiri stamp on flimsy.

Postal stationery is represented by core pieces of several different fields: For example, the original drawing, the die proof and the first day usage of the very first Swiss postal stationery is shown (ch. 6.3). Chapter 6.2 includes a unique combination of Tasmanian landscape envelopes documenting the two selling post offices as well as the identical contemporary postage rate for Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth usages on the two only known used copies of the Lake Crescent envelope.

German PTPO stationery are especially strong with no less than 9 unique pieces, amongst them the core piece of the so-called Anzeigen-Kartenbriefe of German Reich, the unique Mülhausen envelope (ch. 1.3), or the unique Bavarian PTPO answer-card (2.5). Last but not least, all three bird-featuring Dehne-Karten (Württemberg PTPO stationery of which only one copy each received a stamp imprint) are present in this exhibit.

Core items of several other highly popular collecting fields are present: The unique colour proof card for the peace dove stamps of the German 1947 Kontrollratsausgabe is “the” key items for any traditional collection of this very popular area, and the only known single franking of the New Zealand 1898 1 shilling Kaka/Kea stamp ranks amongst the most significant items of this definitives issue. The “Carrier Pigeon” ship letter (ch. 5.5) documents the Australian ship mail route via Valparaiso which was missing in the London 2000 Grand Prix exhibit of Trevor Davis.

Attention is given to quality, especially with postal history items where clarity of the strikes matters. Examples for superb quality of rare items can be found in several U.S. postmarks, for example the White Pigeon Prairie cancellation in chapter 1.3. Many other items already mentions in this section for their importance and rarity deserve the title of “the finest known example”.

And now please enjoy studying the “Fascination with Feathers”!

Appendix: Plan of the Exhibit

Part 1: Bird tracks in culture: three times three first indications of the “fascination with feathers”

- 1.1 Colours, shapes and figures – Bird depictions in art
- 1.2 Coats of arms, coins and totem poles - They all are “winged” emblems
- 1.3 Places, ships and persons – Birds as inspiration

No other group of animals is as present as the world of birds in pictures, symbols and the language of mankind. In the course of the exhibit we will see why this is the case. But here is the central thesis:

Part 2: The birds themselves ensure this fascination

You don't believe it? Then accompany me on an ornithological excursion:

- 2.1 Join me on an excursion into unspoiled nature.
- 2.2 Observe the fascinating birds in zoos, parks – and in the middle of the city
- 2.3 Or just lean back and marvel at the world of birds from your own sofa
- 2.4 Scientists and laymen – both got inspired. They devoted their lives to the exploration and naming of the world of birds
- 2.5 But only the scientific system ensures the breakthrough in ornithology

Part 3: The fascinating world of birds connects us humans with our own existence

- 3.1 Also common people observe bird behaviour – they, however, interpret it from a human perspective
- 3.2 Sayings, fairytales and legends transfigure these characteristics of birds
- 3.3 And finally, striking species become the symbol of whole regions

Part 4: Birds on coats of arms and bird feathers are the symbolic expression of this connection

- 4.1 On the sign: The eagle and his comrades as a symbol of power
- 4.2 On the letter and above the clouds: Feathers as a symbol of speed and mobility
- 4.3 On the head and on clothes: Feathers decorate and secure status

Part 5: Fascinating relationships between birds and people – very real and without symbolism

- 5.1 From the symbol to the profane: There are other needs for feathers
- 5.2. Winged delicacies
- 5.3 Successful hunting enables such treats
- 5.4 Planned according to needs – poultry keeping is the more efficient way to gain meat and feathers
- 5.5 Bird keeping with “higher goals”: Partnerships between mankind and birds
- 5.6 Friends in the living room – the hobby of birdcages and aviaries

We have therefore made friends with the feathered creature in our living room. But as soon as we look out of the window, we find a shocking picture:

Part 6: But what will become of the “fascination with feathers” in open nature?

- 6.1 A look outside: The bird world cries S.O.S.
- 6.2 A creature under threat: People provide their services
- 6.3 Future or utopia: Three visions for the “fascination with feathers”