

# Retd IFS officer Madiraju Lokeswara Rao releases book on Himalayan bird stamps

The recently released *Himalayan Birds on Stamps* tell the tale of Himalayan birds and philatelic products

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The book titled *Himalayan Birds on Stamps* released by the Chief Postmaster General, S. Rajendra Kumar, (center-left) and written by retd IFS officer Madiraju Lokeswara Rao (center-right). | Photo Credit: Madiraju Lokeswara Rao/Special Arrangement

Where can you find India's vibrant Monal Pheasant, Nepal's Great Himalayan Barbet or Bhutan's Satyr Tragopan in one place? On postal stamps of course!

Since 1954, the Indian postal service has issued stamps with birds; some were symbolic such as the 1966 Children's Day stamp which depicted a pigeon as the sign of peace, while some were bird species such as the Brown-fronted woodpecker or the Red-billed Blue Magpie of the late 1960s.

Weaving together the tales of Himalayan birds and various philatelic products, Madiraju Lokeswara Rao, a retired IFS officer from the batch of 1983, has compiled a book titled *Himalayan Birds on Stamps*, that narrates the story of different species of Himalayan birds. It was released on December 9 by the Chief Postmaster General, S. Rajendra Kumar.



Stamp with the Himalayan Monal Pheasant from India. | Photo Credit: Madiraju Lokeswara Rao/Special Arrangement

The Himalayas are a biodiversity hotspot with some of the world's highest peaks hosting a range of diverse flora and fauna found nowhere else. Often dubbed as the Third Pole, the young mountain range regulates climate and is the source of major river systems in Asia.

However, climate change and human activity have jeopardised the rich ecosystems, including bird populations that thrive here.

“Construction work in the northern Himalayan regions has caused deforestation. Coupled with climatic events such as cloud bursts, the region has faced landslides and flooding causing major destruction and damage,” Madiraju Lokeswara Rao said, adding. “It has severely affected avian populations — an important marker for a healthy ecosystem — and they need protection.”

Stamps and philatelic products have been a tool for conservation in India since 1975. The Western Tragopan, the state bird of Himachal Pradesh and an endangered bird holding ‘Vulnerable’ status in the International Union for Conservation of Nature list, was the first to be featured on Indian stamps.

Rao’s book gives a comprehensive view of philatelic material such as stamps, stamp blocks, first-day covers, postcards, miniature sheets and maxim cards that features Himalayan birds from different countries. It explains the different type of stamps released by the Himalayan countries of Nepal and Bhutan, their conservation status and the efforts made to conserve them. Stamps from India, China and Pakistan, where only a portion of the area falls in the Himalayan region have also been released.



Stamp of Satyr Tragopan from Bhutan | Photo Credit: Madiraju Lokeswara Rao/Special Arrangement

“Stamps are a powerful advocacy tool in conservation as they pass through multiple hands in the postal system. The bright colours and appealing designs attract far more attention than other stamps. It can be used as a channel to educate and rouse interest in the public, especially through children and philatelic groups,” says Rao.

No stranger to hands-on conservation efforts, Rao during his tenure as the principal chief conservator of forests and head of forest force in Nagaland, was instrumental in ending the hunting of Amur Falcons, a migratory raptor that travels over 20,000 km from Mongolia to East Africa, stopping in the Doyang region for two months. He was also part of the breeding programme for the Himalayan tragopan in Nagaland.

“The aim of writing this book is to create awareness and instil a sense of individual social responsibility about the environment among the public. I urge the government to devote at least 10% of upcoming stamps to being nature- and conservation-themed,” he adds.

Priced at ₹1,599, *Himalayan Birds on Stamps* is available online.