

United States Postage Stamps with Fungi—in Color

Brian S. Luther

The purpose of this article is to bring together, in one place and in color, descriptions of all United States postage with fungi issued to date. I have described all of these items previously in the PSMS newsletter *Spore Prints* (Luther, 2000, 2005, 2010 & 2011). However, I was not able to include all of the Scott Catalogue nos., nor was I able to include all the photos in color. Also, the articles have been scattered over several years. By updating the information and bringing these stamps together, I hope that you can more fully appreciate them.

All catalog numbers mentioned are from the Scott Postage Stamp Catalogues. M = mushrooms or fungi that appear as the main illustration; MID = mushrooms or fungi that appear in the design of the illustration, border, or background but are not intended to be part of the primary stamp illustration. *All stamp photos are by Brian S. Luther.*



Cat. No.	Date of Issue	Value	Type
2297	6/13/87	22¢	MID

This is the first US stamp showing a fungus. The main illustration is an Eastern Chipmunk, but in the lower right-hand corner are two basidiocarps of *Hypholoma sublateritium*, appearing to grow from the dead branch the chipmunk is on. This is one of 50 different animal stamps on a full sheet called the “American Wildlife” issue. There is one stamp for each state, but the individual states are not specified. The full sheet is designated Scott no. 2335a, and the individual issues are nos. 2286–2335. All stamps on this sheet are perforated, with gum.

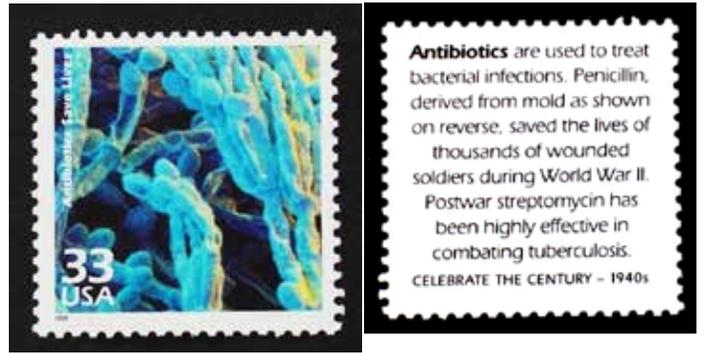


Cat. No.	Date of Issue	Value	Type
2335	6/13/87	22¢	MID

The main illustration is a Red Fox. There are four basidiocarps on the log underneath the fox: to the left are three small basidiocarps of a species of polypore (presumably) and on the right is a single conk of another species. The conk on the right could be the genus *Fomitopsis*, but definitive identification of both species is impossible, as there are many possibilities. There appear to be small red mushrooms on the ground around the log as well, but they are visible only under magnification and are not clear. The artist may be showing leafy debris, etc. This is on the same sheet of 50 animals discussed above.

Cat. No	Date of Issue	Value	Type
3186b	2/18/99	33¢	M

This is the first US postage stamp issued with a fungus as the main illustration. It's an SEM (scanning electron microscope) view of conidiophores with conidia (*Penicillium* sp.) and is artificially colored blue-green to look like the growing mold. Many mycophiles probably would have preferred that some kind of mushroom had been given the honor of being the first US stamp with a fungus as the primary illustration; instead we got this anamorphic fungus. The stamp is labeled on the left "Antibiotics Save Lives" and there's also a message on the back of the stamp (see photos). It's one of 15 different stamps on the 1940s "Celebrate the Century" sheet (Scott 3186a-o) and could not be purchased individually. To commemorate the upcoming new millennium, in 1999 the US Postal Service issued ten different sheets of stamps, one for each decade of the



20th Century, highlighting what was typical at the time and showing significant developments in all aspects of life. They're a fascinating nostalgic look at things as they were. All stamps on these sheets are perforated, with gum.

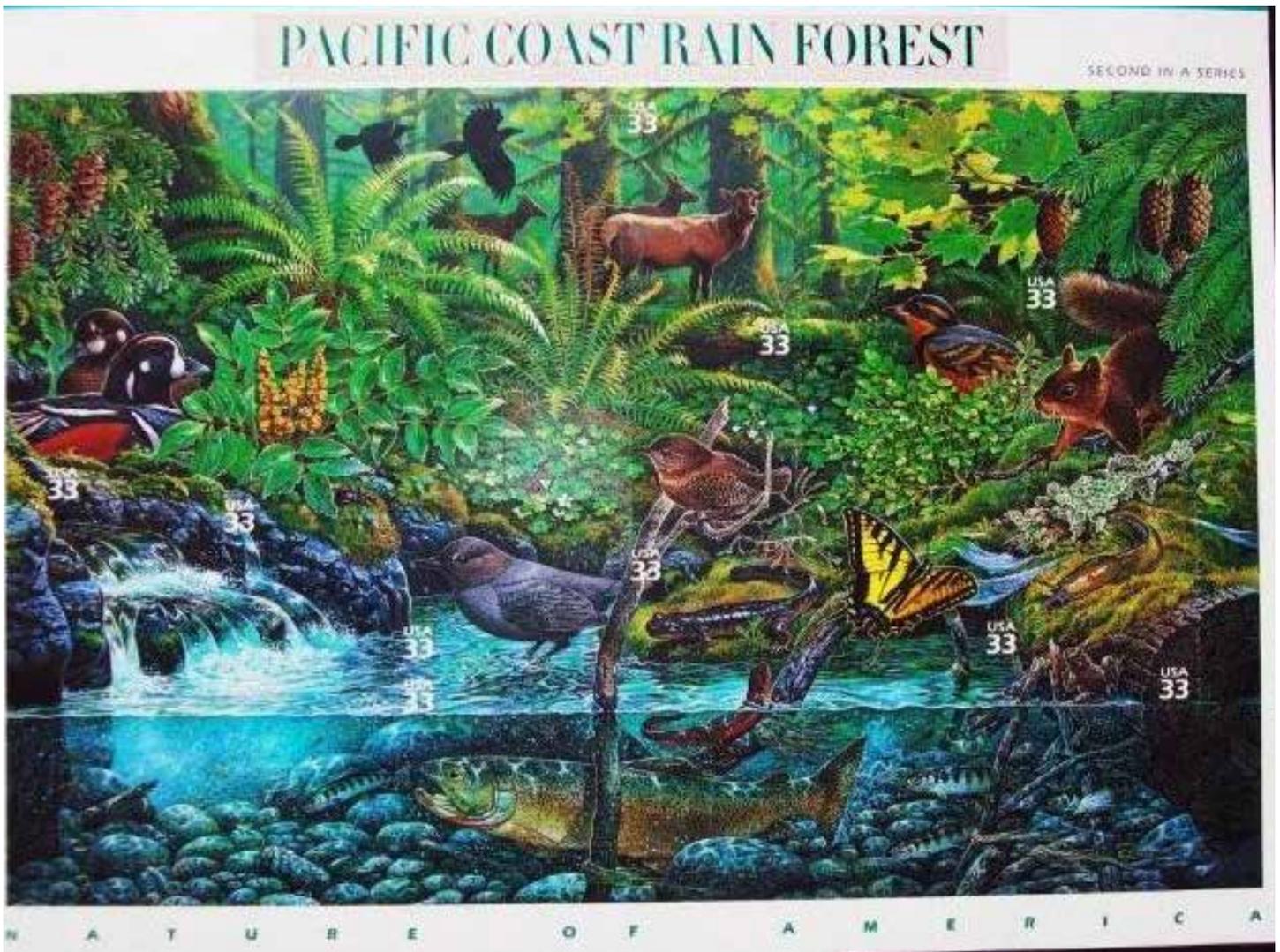
The USPS also issued hardbound commemorative books for each of these 10 sheets, with a wealth of additional information.



Cat. No	Date of Issue	Value	Type
3378a-j	3/29/2000	33¢	MID

These stamps are part of the “Pacific Coast Rain Forest” sheet, the second issued in the “Nature of America” series. The ten 33¢ stamps on the sheet are serpentine die cut (non-perforated) and self-stick and, as with all the stamps in this series, are scattered on the overall panoramic scene of the sheet itself. Several small obscure mushrooms are shown both on the stamps and in the background. Those that I’ve been able to see with a lens include some mycenoid mushrooms on the log

below the Roosevelt Elk stamp (3378e), with some both on and off the stamp; some on and around the adjacent Winter Wren stamp (3378f); and a different clump in the upper right hand corner of the Western Tiger Swallowtail butterfly stamp (3378h). These are clearly visible only with a lens or higher magnification. Issuance of this sheet would have been a perfect opportunity for the USPS to show North American Chanterelles for the first time, but alas it didn’t happen. (In Luther, 2005, I incorrectly listed this sheet as being issued in 1999.)

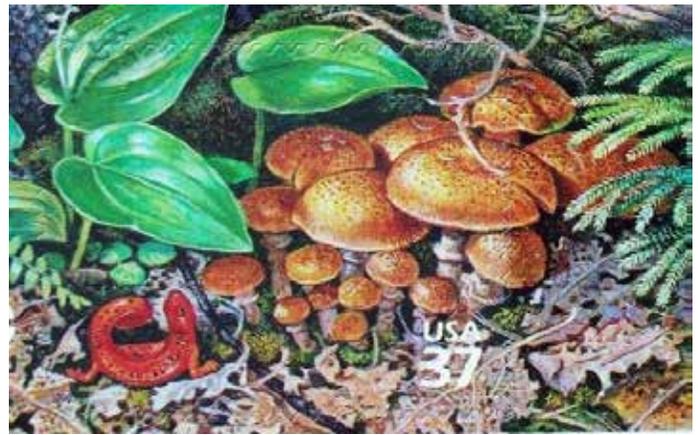


Cat. No.	Date of Issue	Value	Type
3899a-j	3/3/2005	37¢	M & MID

These stamps are on the “Northeast Deciduous Forest” sheet, which is the seventh issued in the “Nature of America” series. (In Luther, 2005, I incorrectly called this the “Eastern Deciduous Forest” sheet.) As with all stamps in this series, they’re die cut and self-stick. The back of the sheet shows the front panoramic illustration in B/W and numbers and labels all the plants, animals, and fungi, regardless of whether they’re the main illustration or not. Two species of fungi are clearly illustrated and listed, with a few additional obscure fungi shown as well.

Scott 3899i shows the Honey Mushroom (*Armillaria mellea*) on about one-third of the stamp, sharing the space with Canada Mayflower and a Red Eft/Eastern Newt. This is labeled stamp no. 14 on the back of the sheet. Because the fungus, flower, and fauna are shown equally, I consider this to be a main (M) illustration. I count 15 whole or portions of mushrooms of this species on the stamp.

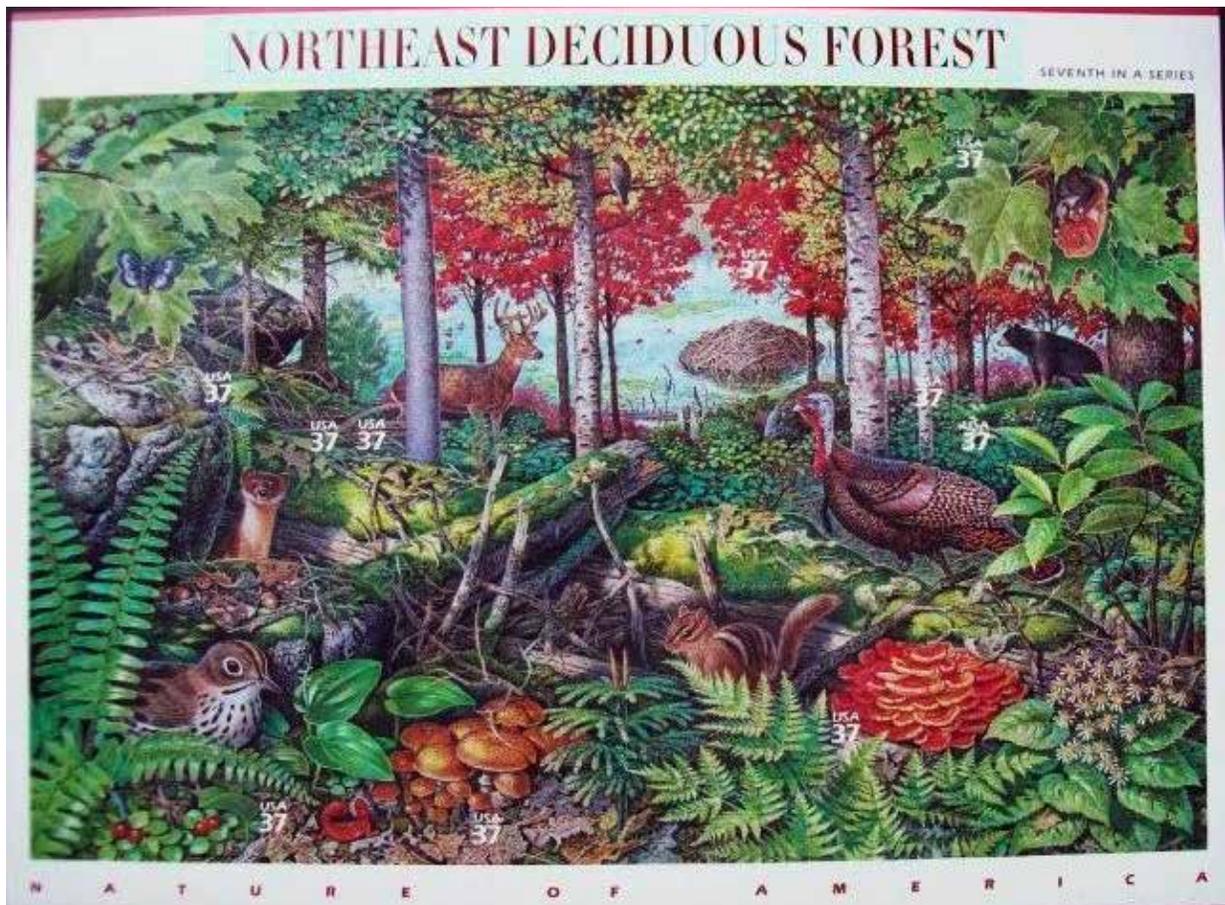
Scott 3899j shows what is labeled as a “Chicken Mushroom” (*Laetiporus sulphureus*), no. 22 on the back of the sheet. The primary illustrations on this stamp are clearly the Eastern Chipmunk and the Spinulose



Scott 3899i, Honey Mushroom.



Scott 3899j, Chicken Mushroom.



Woodfern, with only the lower right-hand corner of the stamp having some of the fungus on it. About 80% of this polypore is not on the stamp but part of the overall adjacent scene. Because of this I consider it to be an MID. The common name for this eastern species is usually Chicken of the Woods or Sulphur Shelf, but many older guide books call it the Chicken Fungus, Sulphur Mushroom, Sulphur Polypore, Sulphurous Mushroom, etc. (For a brief discussion of the genus *Laetiporus* and a key to the North American species, refer to Luther, 2008.)

Above the chipmunk is a mossy log that appears to have a single distinct mushroom on it, and there's a fallen log to the left with possible resupinates along it, both unidentifiable. Also, no. 25 shows American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) sprouts. This indicates that the original Chestnut tree was destroyed by the Chestnut Blight fungus (*Cryphonectria parasitica*, formerly *Endothia*) with new shoots coming from the roots, which are not killed. However, close inspection under a lens does not show any of the bright orange stromata or fungus canker, so you can see the results of the action of this parasite but none of the parasite itself.

The USPS also issued "The Artist's Sketchbook" for this series, which gives more information and many more details about all of John D. Dawson's illustrations, from his point of view, with additional mushroom paintings of the same species.

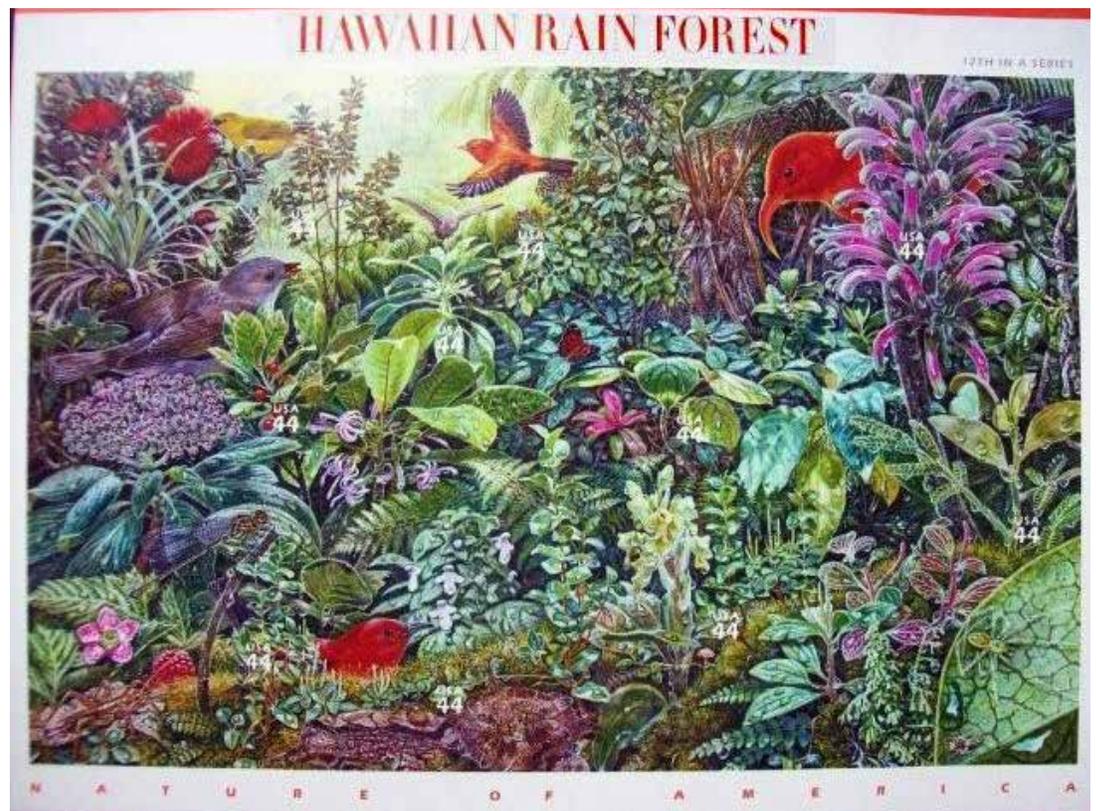
Cat. No	Date of Issue	Value	Type
4474i	9/1/2010	44¢	MID

This stamp is on the "Hawaiian Rain Forest" sheet (Scott 4474a-j) which is the 12th in the "Nature of America" series. Just below no. 17, the Jewel Orchid stamp (listed on the back of the sheet), is a single pink mushroom growing on a moss-covered limb. Only a small portion of the upper cap extends onto the stamp (4474i) itself; most of the mushroom is below and outside of the stamp. I asked Hawaiian mushroom expert Dennis Desjardin for his opinion (Luther, 2010, 2011), and he felt it was most likely *Hygrocybe noelokelani*,



Scott 4474i, *Hygrocybe noelokelani*.

Scott 4474a-j,
"Hawaiian Rain Forest"



a species he and D. E. Hemmes described as new from Hawaii. This species is one of four pictured in color on the front cover of the book *Mushrooms of Hawaii* (Hemmes & Desjardin, 2002).

All of the issues mentioned above are out of print, but can be obtained through various on-line sources or stamp dealers.

If you're interested in learning about the first postage stamps illustrated with fungi worldwide, please refer to Luther (2012).

References

Hemmes, D. E. & Dennis Desjardin. 2002. *Mushrooms of Hawaii—An Identification Guide*. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley. 212 pp.

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