

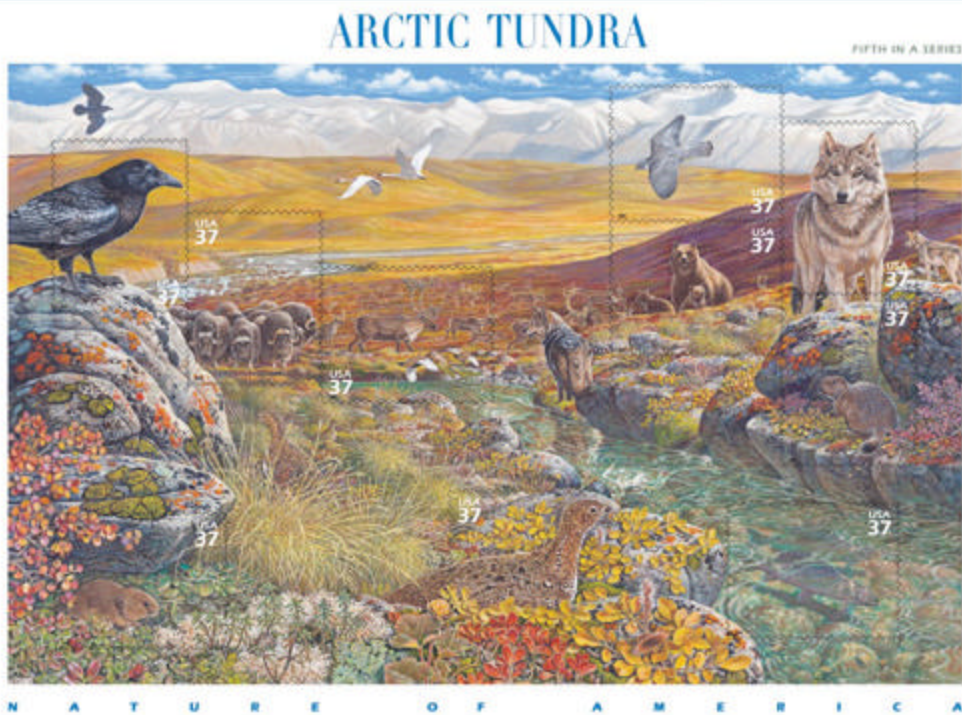
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POPULAR 'NATURE OF AMERICA' STAMP SERIES CONTINUES WITH ISSUANCE OF ARCTIC TUNDRA STAMPS

FAIRBANKS, Alaska — Residents of Fairbanks, and many tourists and visitors, had a special opportunity yesterday to be the first to purchase new commemorative postage stamps celebrating the fascinating plants and animals of the arctic tundra.

Postmaster General John E. Potter and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) dedicated the Arctic Tundra stamps before a crowd gathered at the International Arctic Research Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF).



Attendees received a free ceremony program featuring one of the stamps postmarked with the highly sought first day of issue cancellation, and many lined up to have the program autographed by the participants of the official dedication ceremony.

The Arctic Tundra stamps are now available at Post Offices across the country.

“These stamps are vivid reminders that U.S. mail is delivered to every home and business from the east coast to the west coast and north to ‘The Last Frontier’ — all at reasonable rates” said Potter.

Joining Potter and Stevens at the first day ceremony were Dr. Brian Barnes, professor and director, Institute of Arctic Biology, UAF; Dr. Syun-Ichi Akasofu, director, IARC; Orié Williams, director, Doyon, Ltd.; Dianne Horbochuk, district manager, Alaska District, Postal Service; and Fairbanks Postmaster Raymond E. Clark.

The Arctic Tundra stamps come in a pane of 10 stamps. The individual designs are part of a larger scene illustrated by John D. Dawson.

The pane is the fifth in an educational series promoting appreciation of North America’s major plant and animal communities. The previous issuances in the Nature of America series were Sonoran Desert (1999), Pacific Coast Rain Forest (2000), Great Plains Prairie (2001) and Longleaf Pine Forest (2002).

Coldest of the North American ecosystems, the arctic tundra is a vast treeless region stretching across northern Alaska and Canada. Here the soil is permanently frozen except for the surface layer, thawed by the summer sun, where plants take root. The frozen soil, or permafrost, keeps the surface layer moist by preventing water from seeping deeply into the ground.

Summer sunlight in the Arctic is long, but the growing season is short. Arctic plants have adapted to survive the cold and wind. Most grow close to the ground, many are evergreen, and all are frost hardy. Although there are no trees on the tundra, other plants flourish here: shrubs and herbs (nonwoody plants), sedges and grasses and lichens and mosses.

The tundra provides habitat for diverse fauna, including mammals, birds, insects and fish. Large mammals such as the muskox, the grizzly bear and gray wolf are tundra inhabitants. The tundra serves as the calving grounds for caribou and also provides nesting sites for many species of migratory birds.

The Arctic Tundra stamp pane depicts an autumn tundra scene in the northern foothills of the majestic Brooks Range in Alaska. In fall the leaves and berries of tundra plants make a brilliant tapestry of red, yellow and orange. Animals prepare for the long arctic winter. Some migrate, while others have found ways to survive the intense cold. Caribou cross mountains, plains and braided rivers to reach the taiga, the spruce-hardwood forest south of the tundra. Tundra swans fly across the continent to wintering areas on the Atlantic coast. Arctic grayling, freshwater fish found in tundra streams and lakes, live in deep water under the ice all winter. As willow ptarmigans begin molting into white plumage that conceals them in snow, singing voles build forage piles of vegetation for winter feeding. Grizzly bears and arctic ground squirrels fatten before hibernating. Arctic woolly bear caterpillars, which can live as larvae for 14 years before becoming moths, undergo the most extreme change: they freeze in winter and thaw in summer.

To illustrate the diversity of species found in the arctic tundra, Dawson portrayed 24 animal and plant species in his beautiful acrylic painting. Although the scene itself is imaginary, all species represented are appropriate and were recommended by researchers from UAF’s Institute of Arctic Biology and the Marine Biological Laboratory of Woods Hole, Mass., who

served as consultants on the project to ensure an accurate and dynamic portrayal of life in the Arctic. A description of the arctic tundra and a numbered key to the artwork appear on the back of the pane, along with a corresponding list of common and scientific names for the 24 species.

To see the Arctic Tundra stamps, visit the Postal Service Web site and open this press release at www.usps.com/communications/news/stamps/welcome.htm.

Current U.S. stamps, as well as a free comprehensive catalog, are available by toll-free phone order at 1 800 STAMP-24. In addition, a selection of stamps and other philatelic items are available at the online Postal Store at www.usps.com/shop.

Since 1775, the U.S. Postal Service has connected friends, families, neighbors and businesses by mail. It is an independent federal agency that visits 140 million homes and businesses every day and is the only service provider to deliver to every address in the nation. The Postal Service receives no taxpayer dollars for routine operations, but derives its operating revenues solely from the sale of postage, products and services. With annual revenues of more than \$66 billion, it is the world's leading provider of mail and delivery services, offering some of the most affordable postage rates in the world. The Postal Service delivers more than 43 percent of the world's mail volume—some 203 billion letters, advertisements, periodicals and packages a year—and serves 7 million customers each day at its 38,000 retail locations nationwide.