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NEW REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS STAMPS ARE SLITHERING OUT OF SAN DIEGO ZOO TO POST OFFICES NATIONWIDE

SAN DIEGO — Amid more than 500 wide-eyed young people enjoying a school field trip, five creatures that croak, hop, slither and slide came alive today on new commemorative stamps issued by the U.S. Postal Service at the San Diego Zoo.

The Reptiles & Amphibians stamps are available today at the Zoo and at San Diego Post Offices. The 37-cent, self-adhesive stamps will be available at Post Offices across the country starting Oct. 8.

“The incredibly life-like Reptiles & Amphibians stamps remind us of how fun and educational stamp collecting can be for people of all ages,” said San Diego Postmaster Glenn Crouch, who dedicated the stamps. “At the same time, these stamps help us appreciate the varied and wonderful creatures that share our planet and the role we play in preserving and protecting them.”

Joining Crouch at the first day ceremony were Thompson Fetter, president, Zoological Society of San Diego, and Dave Coulier, actor/comedian and voice-over artist. Special guests also included two entertaining sea lions and “Squeeze,” an enormous boa constrictor that required three people to assist in his on-stage appearance.

Each year, the Postal Service designates October as National Stamp Collecting Month and issues a commemorative stamp — or stamps — that appeal to young people. This year the Reptiles and Amphibians stamps help highlight this educational and family-oriented activity.

The Reptiles and Amphibians stamps feature five digital illustrations by Steve Buchanan of two amphibians and three reptiles: the blue-spotted salamander, the ornate chorus frog, the reticulate collared lizard, the ornate box turtle and the scarlet kingsnake.

Reptiles and amphibians have long fascinated human observers; these mysterious creatures are prominent in the history, religion and mythology of many cultures. Although some people fear them, reptiles and amphibians are beneficial to humans and the environment. Sensitive indicators of environmental health and quality,



their presence or absence can show if an area is healthy or potentially hazardous for wildlife and humans. Key species in wetland and terrestrial habitats, they play important roles in the food chain. As predators, they help control populations of rodents and insects. Venom from some species of snakes has significant medical applications.

Unfortunately, populations of many reptiles and amphibians are declining. The causes include habitat loss, air and water pollution, global climate change, invasive species, exploitation by human beings and disease.

The blue-spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*) lives in forests with moist soil. A secretive amphibian, it stays under cover during the day, hiding under leaves or logs or in burrows. At night, it emerges to search for food on the forest floor. When threatened by predators, it releases a sticky foul-tasting substance from glands in the skin of its back and tail. This long-tailed salamander earns its name from the blue spots on its shiny, black body. Its range includes the northeastern United States and the Great Lakes region.

A nocturnal amphibian, the ornate chorus frog (*Pseudacris ornata*) is more often heard than seen. Its distinctive call is a series of rapid metallic peeps, which it gives during late fall, winter and early spring. This frog lives near ponds, ditches and wet meadows. Although it is a member of the tree frog family, its toe-pads are so small that it burrows in the ground instead of climbing trees. It always has black or dark brown spots on its sides, but can vary in color from tan or brown to green, or be a mixture of these hues. The ornate chorus frog is found in the southern U.S. coastal plain and in north Florida.

The reticulate collared lizard (*Crotaphytus reticulatus*) is an alert, active reptile with a large head, long tail and strong limbs. When moving fast, it runs upright on its hind legs. If cornered, it may hold its mouth open in a display meant to frighten antagonists. A resident of thorny brush country in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, it may be seen sunning on rocks or found hiding beneath rocks or debris. "Reticulate" means netlike; this lizard has a network of pale lines on its head, body and limbs, as well as black spots on its back. Its "collar" is a vertical black bar on the sides of its neck.

The ornate box turtle (*Terrapene ornata*) is a reptile of prairies and open woodlands. It burrows to escape the heat, and large numbers sometimes emerge after rainstorms. This turtle has an important adaptation that protects it from predators — it can close its shell completely because it has a hinged plastron (lower shell). It may be recognized by the radiating yellow lines on its dark carapace (upper shell). It is found primarily in the central and southwestern United States.

Although harmless, the colorful scarlet kingsnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum elapsoides*) closely resembles the venomous eastern coral snake, whose snout is black rather than red. The kingsnake has black bands separating red and yellow

bands; the coral snake has red and yellow bands touching. As the saying goes, “Red on yellow kills a fellow. Red on black, friend of Jack.” This mimicry protects the scarlet kingsnake from potential predators. A secretive woodland reptile, it is seldom seen in the open except at night or after heavy rains. A powerful constrictor, its prey includes venomous snakes, for it is apparently immune to their venom. The scarlet kingsnake is found in the southeastern and south-central United States.

To see the Reptiles and Amphibians 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.

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