

Landlocked Countries: Burundi

by Geir Sør-Reime

Burundi is a small landlocked country in East Africa with an area of 10,747 square miles, and around 15 million people.

The Burundian state is known since the late 16th century and was a monarchy ruled by the mwami (the ruler).

It came under colonial rule from around 1884, when the German East Africa Company started operations there. In 1891, the company transferred its rights to the German Empire. Burundi then became part of German East Africa, which also included Rwanda and Tanganyika (the mainland part of present-day Tanzania).

The German administration of Ruanda and Urundi (Burundi) was based in Usumbura (from 1962 known as Bujumbura) and a German East Africa post-office was opened there in 1902. In 1912, the German administration was moved close to the residence of the Kings of Burundi and a new town, Gitega was established, and is now the second largest city of Burundi, after Usumbura. A post-office named Urundi was established there in 1913.

Top to bottom: German East Africa (GEA), Usumbura 1902 opening of post office; GEA, Usumbura 1903 letter; GEA, postmarks (of Urundi and Usumbura)



The German post-offices in Burundi used ordinary stamps of German East Africa, the 1901 stamps showing the Imperial Yacht Hohenzollern and with values in pesa and rupees, replaced in 1905 with values in heller and rupees.



GEA, Left to right: 1901 2 Pesa (Sc. 11); 1905 60 Heller without watermark (Sc. 29); 1905-19 4 Heller with watermark (Sc. 32)

British and Belgian forces launched attacks on German East Africa in 1916. The German forces in Burundi and Ruanda had to retreat and the Belgian forces occupied them by June 17, 1916.

Already in July, stamps of Belgian Congo hand-stamped RUANDA. or URUNDI were issued, and both sets were valid in both Ruanda and Burundi.

In November 1916, the same stamps of Belgian Congo overprinted "Belgian Occupation of German East Africa" in French and Flemish were issued for use in the occupied territory.

In May 1918, similar stamps of Belgian Congo, overprinted "A.O." (for East Africa) and surcharged to make them semi-postals were issued. In 1922, some of the 1916 stamps were surcharged with new values.

In 1920, Ruanda and Burundi was made a League of Nations mandate administered by Belgium with the name Ruanda Urundi.



Belgian occupation (in Scott listed under German East Africa), left to right, top to bottom: Ruanda-Urundi 1916 Ruanda overprint (Sc. N1); Ruanda-Urundi 1916 Urundi overprint (Sc. N9); Ruanda-Urundi 1916 Belgian occupation (Sc. N21); Ruanda-Urundi 1922 surcharges (Sc. N28); Ruanda-Urundi 1918 semi-postals (Sc. NB1-9)

In 1924, Belgian Congo stamps overprinted "RUANDA URUNDI" were issued.

The first stamps inscribed RUANDA-URUNDI were issued in 1931, a set of pictorials featuring local scenes (page 2).



Ruanda-Urundi overprints, left to right: 1924 (Sc. 12); 1927 (Sc. 24); 1929 (Sc. 28)

A new pictorial definitive series was issued 1942-44, again featuring local scenes and animals. After WWII, a definitive series featuring native art was issued, and in 1953, a definitive set featured local flora.



Ruanda-Urundi 1931 definitives (Sc. 40, 42)



Ruanda-Urundi, left to right: 1932 definitive (Sc. 37); 1942-44 definitives (Sc. 84, 81)



Ruanda-Urundi 1949-50 Native Art definitives (Sc. 90-93)



Ruanda-Urundi 1953 definitive flowers (Sc. 114-16)

The Belgian king, Baudoin I, visited Ruanda-Urundi in 1955 and his visit was commemorated with four stamps.

Endangered wildlife was featured on the 1959 definitive series and two additional values were added to this series in 1961.



Ruanda-Urundi: Top, 1955 royal visit—King Baudouin (Sc. 133)

Middle, 1959 definitive (Sc. 138, 148)

Ruanda-Urundi 1961 definitive (Sc. 149-50)

The last issue of Ruanda-Urundi was a 1961 set showing the Cathedral of Bujumbura (inscribed Usumbura).

Burundi became an independent kingdom July 1, 1962, and stamps of the Flora and Endangered Species series were overprinted “Kingdom of Burundi” in French.

Independence was celebrated with nine stamps issued September 27, 1962, featuring King Mwambutsa IV or the national arms and flag. On July 1, 1963, this set was overprinted to celebrate the first anniversary of independence.

His son, Prince Louis Rwagasore and his party won the September 1961 elections, but this popular 29 year old politician was assassinated October 13, 1961.

He was mourned with a 1963 set of six semi-postal stamps. In 1966, he was again commemorated on a set of stamps mourning his and John F. Kennedy’s assassinations.



Ruanda-Urundi 1961 Usumbura Cathedral (Sc. B31-36)



Top row, Burundi 1962 overprints (on Ruanda-Urundi) (Sc. 1, 8)

2nd row, Burundi 1962 independence (Sc. 30, 26)



Burundi: Above left, 1962 prince Louis Rwagasore (Sc. B3); above right, 1962 Dag Hammarskjöld (in memoriam) (Sc. 34); right, 1966 Kennedy and Rwagasore (Sc. B27)

For the third anniversary of independence in 1965 a set of metal foil stamps reproducing the coins issued for the anniversary was issued.



1965 independence 3 yrs, B22



In 1964 Burundi’s first distinct definitive series featuring African mammals was issued (page 3), and already in 1965, a second definitive series featuring African birds was

issued. The last definitive series of the monarchy featured flowers and was issued in 1966.

The last issue for the monarchy commemorated the 20th anniversary of UNESCO and was issued November 4, 1966.



Burundi, top to bottom Burundi 1964 definitive air post (Sc. C1, C7); 1965 Birds definitive (Sc. 123-125); 1966 Flowers definitive (Sc. 155-56); 1966 definitive air post (Sc. C24-25); 1966 20th Anniv. of UNESCO (Sc. 157)

There was much tension between the two socio-ethnic groups of Burundi, the Hutu and the Tutsi, the traditional ruling class. After the 1965 elections that resulted in a Hutu majority in the Parliament, the King appointed a Tutsi prime minister, then fled the country during an attempted Hutu coup d'état in October 1965. He was deposed by a new coup in July 1966, but his son Prince Ntare V claimed the throne, only to be deposed after a November 1966 coup.

The monarchy was then abolished, and Burundi became a republic.

In February 1967, the birds and flower definitive issues of the monarchy, and a set prepared for the fourth anniversary of independence were all issued with the kingdom title covered by bars and the republic title added (Republique du Burundi).

A new definitive series featuring fishes was then issued during April/May and September 1967.

The first anniversary of the republic was celebrated November 1967 with four stamps, two of them featuring a portrait of the President, Michel



1967 Republic overprints on kingdom stamps (top row. Sc. 172-73; 2nd row, Sc. and 182-84, C27-35A-1); 3rd row, 1967 definitive fish (Sc. 196-97; bottom row, 1967 1st anniversary of republic (Sc. 220, 218)

Micombero, on one together with the new national flag. Two of the stamps showed the republic's national arms.



Above, 1970 royal visit, Pres. Micombero and King Baudouin (Sc. C141); right, 1970 republic 4 years (Sc. 347-49)



The fourth anniversary of the republic was celebrated on three 1970 stamps, one depicting President Micombero and his wife, another the President with the national flag, and one showing the Square of the Republic.

President Micombero was also featured together with the Belgian royal couple on 1970 stamps issued for their state visit to Burundi.

The tenth anniversary of independence in 1972 was commemorated with six stamps, four of which portrayed both President Micombero and Prince Louis Rwagasore, and two portrayed Micombero with the national flag (page 4).

The 15th anniversary of independence was commemorated in 1977

with four stamps featuring the main industries and the National Palace in Bujumbura, and with the presidential portrait replaced by the national arms, as Micombero had been deposed in a 1976 coup.



1972 independence 10 years (Sc. C172-74)



1977 independence 15 years (Sc. 538-39)

The 20th anniversary of independence was celebrated with five 1983 stamps, one of which portrayed President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza who led the coup that deposed Micombero. Bagaza was himself overthrown in 1987.



Burundi 1983 independence 20 years (Sc. 604,606)

A planned issue for the tenth anniversary of Bagaza's 'Second Republic' in 1986 was prepared but not issued.



Burundi 1986 2nd republic 10 years unissued (Sc. unlisted)

The 30th anniversary of independence in 1992 was marked by eight stamps with no presidential portraits.

(Next column) A definitive series showing butterflies was issued 1968, followed 1970 by a series featuring beetles. In 1983 another definitive series showing African mammals was issued.



Burundi 1992 independence 30 years (Sc. 677-78)

Top to bottom: 1968 definitive butterflies air post (Sc. C73-74); 1970 definitive beetles (Sc. 306, 308); 1983 definitive wild-life (Sc. 590-91)



What has been called the First Burundian Genocide started in April 1972 with between 80,000 and 210,000 people killed and several thousand Hutu fleeing to other countries. A second genocide took place in 1993 with mass killings of Tutsis by the Hutu majority.

In 1994, on the first anniversary of the death of President Melchior Ndadaye a set of stamps was issued. He had been elected 1993 in a democratic election and was the first Hutu head of state. He was assassinated during a failed military coup after only three months in office.



Burundi 1994 president Ndadaye (Sc. B100-101)

Early 1994, the Parliament elected Cyprien Ntaryamira, also Hutu, as President. He and the Hutu president of Rwanda were killed when their airplane was shot down in April 1994, leading to more violence.

From 2012 onwards, almost all Burundi stamps have been thematic and with little or no relation to Burundi.

One exception was a 2012 quartet showing Burundian coffee.



2012 coffee



Burundi 2012 royal drummers and dancers

Other exceptions were four 2012 stamps showing the Royal Drummers and Dancers of Burundi, and four 2013 stamps commemorating the 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between China and Burundi, featuring meetings between Chinese and Burundian politicians. In 2018, six further stamps commemorated the 55th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between China and Burundi.

Right, 2013 diplomatic relations China 50 years; below, 2018 diplomatic relations China 55 years



Diplomatiques entre la République du Burundi et la République Populaire de Chine
 中华人民共和国—布隆迪共和国建交55周年纪念
 1963-2018



For the 50th anniversary of independence in 2012, eleven stamps portraying the heads of state of Burundi after independence were issued. They portrayed King Mwambutsa IV (1915-66), King Ntare V (1966), and Prince Louis Rwagasore, and Presidents Michel Micombero (1966-76), Jean-Baptiste Bagaza (1976-87), Pierre Buyoya (1987-93, 1998-2003), Melchior Ndadaye (1993), Cyprien Ntaryamira (1994), Sylvestre Ntibantunganya (1994-96), Domitien Ndayizeye (2003-05), and Pierre Nkurunziza (2005-2020).



2012, Heads of State



2022, 60th Anniversary of Independence

The 60th anniversary of independence was the topic of four 2022 stamps (page 5) and included portraits of Presidents Pierre Nkurunziza (president 2005-20), and Evariste Ndayishimiye (president from 2022).

In 2021, there was a series of stamps showing fauna of Burundi, as well as a set of stamps for the 152nd birth anniversary of Gandhi.



2021 fauna



2021 Gandhi

Burundi has issued a few aerograms, the first in 1962.

- Top to bottom,
- 1962 aerogram (NGK 1)
- 1972 aerogram (NGK3)
- 1978 aerogram (NGK 4)



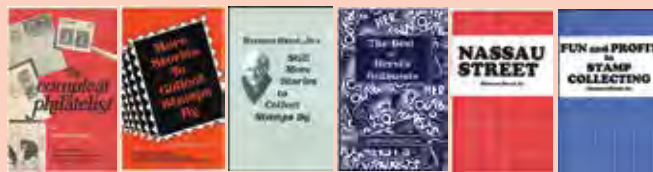
In addition, from around 2003, there exist numerous unauthorized, illegal stamps inscribed Burundi.

Full details can be seen on <https://golowesstamps.com/reference/Illegal%20Stamps/Burundi%20Illegal%20Stamps/>

Note that the 2004 illegals are inscribed "Republika y'u Burundi".

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