

# More on the 2024 Flags Issue And A Couple of Animals in Trees

by Rudy de Mordaige

Last month's column had a key to the 2024 Flags issue, but with a typo. In the first line of flags, the Ashton Potter 100-stamp coil strip showed the Scott number of two of the stamps as 5873. Well, that couldn't be the case, as sharp-eyed reader Ron Heimpel pointed out. He assumed the second 5873 should have been 5874, and that is correct.

Rather than just giving you a correction to make, which might be tricky with an online publication, or if you print out the column and save it, lining out the typo and penciling in the correct number, here's the whole key again, on page 11, with the Scott number corrected.

### Tagging gaps on 100-stamp Flags coils

The 2024 coils had tagging gaps. It would be fun to spot a used single with a tagging gap, but you would have to know what to look for, and have a shortwave lamp.

Back on the soapbox. Used to be the tools of a philatelist were tongs, a magnifier, perforation gauge and maybe a watermark tray and fluid. That was then. If you collect modern issues, paper isn't watermarked, but it does differ, and the only way to spot that is with a longwave ultraviolet lamp. Tagging is another way the modern

stamps differ, and if you want to see that, you need a shortwave lamp, or a lamp that features both wavelengths. The first tagged stamp, an 8¢ Airmail, was issued August 1, 1963. There's 61 years of missing information if you don't use a shortwave lamp.

When I was a kid, our dentist had a drill that was at least powered by electricity, with cords running from the motor over pulleys on the side of the arm to turn the drill head. Grind, grind, grind. Slow, to say the least. If our dentist was like a lot of collectors, he'd still be using that drill. Now, hopping off the box!

A tagging gap occurs at the joint in the cylindrical tagging plate or tagging mat when overall tagging is applied to coil stamps on the press, if the tagging mat cylinder isn't pulled together tightly at the joint. The gap frequently occurs at the left edge of the plate number stamp, but not always.

Figure 1 shows the tagging gaps on the Ashton Potter (APU) and Banknote Corporation of America stamps from 100-stamp rolls. The gap is wide enough to partly occur on neighboring stamps. In the APU coil, when searching used singles, you should look at the wavy diecuts on the right edge of Scott 5872. It might occur just on the tips of the wavy diecut peaks. Find one of these and you can be sure it was the stamp to the left of the plate number stamp in the roll. Surprise your stamp club by showing them how you know.

Any plate number single of Scott 5873 will have a gap along its left edge. Since the plate number occurs every 32nd stamp in the roll, and so does the tagging gap, these won't be easy to find as used singles.

The tagging gap in the 100-stamp BCA rolls occurs every 32 stamps also, making tagging gap examples as uncommon as plate number examples.

### Thin margins

Interestingly, in APU's variety, the stamps are narrower than in the BCA version, Figure 2. Since APU used a paper with a matte surface, in contrast with BCA's glossy surface paper, these should be easy to distinguish when sorting, but you can confirm the ID with

APU top, BCA bottom



Figure 2. The stamps in the APU 100-stamp coil are narrower than the ones in the BCA coil. This isn't readily apparent in single stamps, but the cumulative effect makes an APU coil shorter than one produced by BCA. The difference is in the vertical margins, wider in the BCA version.

5872                      5873                      5874



Figure 1. Tagging gap on the APU 100-stamp coil occurs at the left edge of the plate number stamp. It extends onto Scott 5872 as well.

The paper used is longwave dead.

Plate number always occurs on this design.



5875                      5876                      5877



On the BCA version, the tagging gap occurs at the left edge of the stamp to the left of the plate number stamp and can extend onto its neighbor, Scott 3875. BCA used high-bright paper, which makes the tagging response look bluish white, since the paper brightener responds to shortwave as well as longwave.



**Key to the (68¢) Forever Flag issue of 2024**

*stamp is...*

*printer  
issue date*

*Scott numbers and format*

*a coil with  
square corners*

*APU  
6/14/24*

5871                      5872                      5873                      5874



*matte surface paper, coil of 100, stamps narrower than  
BCA coils (below, not to scale)*

*straight edges top and  
bottom*

*a coil with angular  
corners*

*BCA  
6/14/24*

5875                      5876                      5877                      5878



*glossy surface paper, coil of 100*

*straight edges top and  
bottom*

*a coil with rounded  
corners, matte paper*

*APU  
6/14/24*

5881                      5882                      5879                      5880



*matte surface paper, 3k or 10k coil*

*a booklet stamp with  
glossy surface paper  
2 varieties, either  
diecut up or down*

*BCA  
6/14/25  
left*

5887                      5888                      BCA                      5883                      5884                      APU



*a booklet stamp with  
matte paper  
diecut down only*

*APU  
6/14/24  
right*

5889                      5890                      5885                      5886

*double-sided 20-stamp convertible booklet*

the APU stamp having square corners, since the difference in width is not easy to see in single stamps. In a strip of four stamps, it is.

The APU and BCA images are the same width, so why are the APU stamps thinner? The explanation is in the figure. It's actually funny. Were they trying to use less paper in each roll? And if yes, did the USPS get a discount on the APU coils? I'd be surprised.

#### Tiny teeth



Figure 3. Tiny bridges hold the BCA coils together in a stick. Coils from the inner rows of the web have the bridges on top and bottom. The coils from the outer edges of the web have bridges either on top or the bottom. These are easier to see on stamps that are off their backing

BCA produces the 100-stamp coils in sticks of coils that are as tall as the width of the web. Tiny teeth or "bridges" hold the sticks together, Figure 3. At the post office, the clerk simply snaps the coil off the stick to sell one. The rolls at either end of the stick have the bridges on one side only, with the outer edges being smooth. The APU 100-stamp rolls are individually shrink-wrapped.

The APU 3k and 10k coils have a plate number every 27 stamps, meaning that the press cylinder printed 27 stamps per revolution. There would be just six complete sets of the four designs in that 27-stamp strip, so APU added an extra of Scott 5872, 5873 and 5874 to accommodate the 27-stamp press cylinder, something that Ron Blanks noticed and mentioned in the August 2024 issue of *Coil Line*, journal of the Plate Number Collectors Club.

#### Extra stamps solve a problem

A plate number strip of five from the 3k or 10 coils would have two examples of Scott 5880, and none of Scott 5882, so to have all four designs on a plate number strip, a strip of seven with the plate number stamp in the center is what you will need to have a plate number strip with all four designs. A tagging gap has not appeared on stamps from the large coils, but it's possible that mis-registration of the tagging mat might produce an untagged row of peaks on a single stamp with the 27 stamp interval. Since these rolls are large, there is a better chance of finding one if it occurs. Look closely at any bulk mail that uses these stamps. We have seen this before.

As usual, the large coil format is designed for bulk mailers' stamp affixers, so there is space between adjacent stamps. As pointed out in the key, the corners of the large coil stamps are rounded. The diecutting pattern on either side is identical, so if you push two of these stamps together, they will meet peak to peak, not meshing peak into valley as with the stamps from the 100-stamp rolls.

As with the coils, APU used dead-to-longwave paper for their convertible booklets, so the tagging response is a strong yellow green. BCA used a high-bright paper, so as with their coils, the tagging response appears almost white. You can see a green tagging response if you hold your shortwave lamp to one side so the rays just skim the surface.

#### Bright orange Red Fox in a tree?

Remember the \$1 Red Fox? This definitive was reprinted twice. The original and the first reprint are on dead paper and are Scott 3036. The initial printing was issued August 14, 1998. The first reprint ap-



Figure 4. Red Fox, Scott 3036, first two printings. Both are on paper with a low high-bright response, not quite dead to longwave u/v. Top is the original, issued 8/14/98.



Bottom is an example of the 5/00 reprint, though most of this printing looks just like the one above under longwave. The orange of this fox really pops out, particularly in a dark room and with a good longwave lamp. I suspect an ink change.

peared in May 2000. Can you tell these apart? Well, yes. The original was printed on light cream paper. The first reprint was on whiter paper. But you would be stuck if you didn't have one of each to compare.

Both are on paper that is very low high bright, not quite dead. As a result, the zinc orthosilicate taggant responds with a strong yellow-green glow. The original has plate number B1111. The reprint is B3333. After the B3333 appeared, I got a single from Donna Rajotte's philatelic section of the Providence, RI post office that was supposed to be this printing, plus several others later. On that single, the red fox glows a bright orange under longwave, Figure 4.

On a B3333 plate block and on the other singles, the fox is about the same as on B1111, and it has no bright orange glow. I suspect the second printing had a change of ink that wasn't reported. You might want to keep an eye out for this one when you visit a dealer or a stamp show. Take your longwave lamp and look at any plate blocks of B3333.

A second reprint, appearing in 2002, changed the color order from BCMY to CMYB and the diecut gauge from 11.5 x 11.3 to 11.8 x 11.1. The change in diecut gauge caused Scott to assign catalog number 3036a to this version. Scott, in the *U.S. Specialized*, also remarks on the difference in tagging response, a surprise, since they seldom remark on details of tagging. They report 3036 as having a bright yellow-green appearance, which is correct, and that 3036a appears light blue green.

The paper used for 3036a is high-bright under longwave and since it also responds to shortwave, the brightener response dilutes the yellow-green response of the taggant. Holding the shortwave lamp to the side of the stamp so the beam is almost parallel to the surface shows that the taggant isn't anything unusual—on dead paper it would be a strong yellow green. So along with a diecut gauge change, the second reprint, B1111 again but with a different color order, also had a paper change.

Incidentally, that's a red fox. It looks like it's on a tree branch, and if that's the case, it's a design oops. Gray foxes do climb trees, the only fox species able to do so. They even have retractable claws like cats, but a red fox can't climb a tree.

#### This animal can climb trees

The \$2 Bobcat, Scott 2482, issued June 1, 1990, was printed by the Bureau of Printing and engraving. The taggant applied by the BEP, though the same stuff, varied in the intensity of its application.



Figure 5. Bobcat in two variations. The upper stamp is printed on dead paper, but the tagging response is weak. The bottom example is printed on medium high-bright paper, but the tagging response is strong. The text explains why this might be the case.

The paper used also varied. Figure 5, shows an eye popping example under shortwave that is on paper that is medium high bright compared with an example on dead paper.

You might think that the brighter paper would do what we frequently see, that is, dilute the yellow-green tagging response to a bluish white. This time it didn't. The explanation seems to be that the paper brightener doesn't respond to shortwave, only to longwave, unlike the paper brighteners we see today. Too bad we didn't spot this back when the BEP was still printing stamps, or we could have asked them about the difference. They typically gave a researched response, revealing what they had in their records. If there had been a paper difference, they would have said so.

It looks to me like the strong yellow-green response of that one stamp is due to a more intense application of taggant, and it would be interesting to know why they did that. The tagging response of the other, on dead paper no less, isn't diluted at all, so it must have been applied sparingly. Why the change?

If the lighter application of taggant was the original, there might have been some concern that it wouldn't trigger the cancelers, so a change was made to apply more in a reprinting. And since the underlying paper of the stamp with the more intense tagging response, was medium high bright, not dead, it looks like there was a paper change. The BEP likely would have recorded that also and told us if that was the case.

At any rate, here's another variation to look for in your favorite dealer's stock, or at a stamp show if any are nearby. The drawback of purchasing on the internet is that you can't look for things like this.

As you can see, I've been having fun with my u/v lamp. Just about the only variations we see in the newer issues involve paper brightening phosphors and tagging. Yes, BCA does give us the up/down diecutting difference on the opposite sides of their 20-stamp convertible booklets sometimes, but that's no longer a novelty - it's just scratching the surface of variations today, many of which you can't see with the bright white lamp over your stamp desk. If you have a u/v lamp, happy hunting.

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Questions and comments are invited. Write to me at Rudy de Mordaige, PO Box 184, Olancho, CA 93549, email [pan42ttt@gmail.com](mailto:pan42ttt@gmail.com), or c/o USSN, 42 Sentry Way, Merrimack, NH 03054. I'll answer any questions and include any new information in the column.



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