



The Centenary of the Welsh Crypto-zoological Society



Following the introduction of the Wilding Regional definitive stamps in 1958 it was proposed that regional commemoratives were the natural next step. Wales was to pioneer this, but for some reason these stamps rarely appear in GB collections. Perhaps it was because they are true regionals, in that they were only valid for post within Wales. Or perhaps it was because they defied convention and replaced the Queen's head with the Welsh Dragon. Serious philatelists can be fickle!

This issue from 1958 was the first Welsh commemorative issue. It celebrates the centenary of the Welsh Crypto-Zoological society. Those of you are on the ball will have realised that the term crypto-zoology only came into common usage in 1955, though it had first been used in 1892. The Society started life as the Welsh Unusual Natural History Club in 1858 and based in Swansea. The name was changed in 1936 after a schism when some members left and formed a rival society in the mistaken belief that science could only benefit from study of animals which could be shown to exist. Past presidents have included Hugh Watkins who lived next door to a friend of Charles Darwin's brother-in-law, Johnny Morris OBE best known as the TV presenter of Animal Magic and narrator of Tales of the Riverbank, and David Attenborough, though the society failed to notify him when he was elected. On discovering what had happened he resigned with immediate effect. The Society is dedicated to the identification and study of those animals unique to Wales and seen only fleetingly out of the corner of your eye, or by. They wonder why other crypto-zoologists go to the far ends of the earth when Wales has such a diverse collection of such fauna. They fail to realise that expeditions to Borneo, Mongolia, South America and Mexico are more fun than spending two weeks holed up in a B&B in Llangurig hoping to see the local big cat through the drizzle. And even before the days of Airmiles you could really rack up on the expense claims while abroad.

This set of stamps celebrates four of the animals that the Society has failed to capture or positively identify in over 100 years.

The 3d purple features the Welsh Wildcat (*Felis cambricus*). Wales has more than its fair share of alien big cats with populations of lynx in Monmouthshire, panthers in the suburbs of Dolgellau and leopards everywhere. But these are just escaped pets or from zoos. The two reports of Sabre-toothed Tigers are regarded as fanciful, but have been kept on record. This Welsh Wildcat is truly indigenous to Wales. Sceptics claim it is merely a breed of rather large domestic tabby, and that the picture used on the stamp of the so-called Beast of Brecon is merely "Pwscins", Mrs Myfanwy Hughes' oversized pet cat in playful mood. What do they know? Does that explain the campers who disappeared from a campsite near Borth in 1952 when all that was found were blood splattered tents. Or the scientists from the rival society who were never seen again after they set out to disprove the existence of *F. cambricus* in 1947. This is the Jac y Ripwr of the cat family! The Society has links with the good ladies of Cat Rescue and will inspect any rather large cat brought in for them to care for.

On the 4d blue is the Welsh equivalent of the Loch Ness Monster - Teggie (*Drakontas tegidiensis*). Teggie lives in Llyn Tegid, better known as Bala Lake, Wales' largest natural stretch of freshwater. His existence was first noted by the hermit St Ailbe in 522 AD (probably 8th October). He, or more likely his descendants, have been spotted periodically throughout history, but it was Prof Prydderch of Llandeilo University who noted a periodicity in sightings. All sightings can be plotted on a cycle of 23 years 7 months and 5 days. His next appearance is due on Sept 11, 2019 at 11:30 am, and already hotels in Bala are fully booked. The Prof reckoned these sightings precede the mating ritual when the alpha male of the group comes up for a lungful of air. He also calculated that Teggies have a life span of approximately 210 years based on comparisons of the frequency of their's and his own matings.

Teggies are now considered to be amphibians, like a large form of newt, after tadpoles measuring 4 feet long were reported at the northern end of the lake in 1972. They are listed as a critically endangered species on the IUCN Red Data List and no attempt to threaten them or their habitat is permitted.

The 6d lilac is dedicated to Traed Mawr (*Homo megapodia*), the Welsh Bigfoot, otherwise known as the Old Man of the Mountains. There is much debate about the origins of Traed Mawriau. The traditionalists lean towards the idea that they are descended from the population of a village in Snowdonia which was swallowed up into the bowels of the earth as divine punishment for unmentionable and unpardonable sins and naughtiness in the early 15th Century. They were noted for their large size, hirsuteness and singular lack of intelligence. Other scholars though side with Dr S Simkins and his Out of Anglesey theory of human evolution. The good doctor studied hundreds of people native to all areas of Wales and noted extreme hairiness in the North West to almost total lack of body hair on those from the South East around Chepstow. Other researchers have confirmed that this applies to males too. The stamp shows the pair of footprints found on Glyder Fach in 1928. The larger one measures a full 19 inches. Originally it was supposed that Traed Mawr had feet of different sizes; not only that, but the left foot on the right leg. Later it was ascertained that the prints were left by different individuals. This slab of rock remains the most convincing evidence of Bigfoot's existence, and is kept secure in the vaults of the Welsh National Museum.

The last stamp in the set, the 1/3 green, shows that most elusive of Welsh creatures - the Cardiganshire Chimera or Tylwyth Teg Ceirw - half fairy and half deer, though some say goat. It is most commonly reported being seen after 11pm on Friday or Saturday night, and is said to lure men travelling home, who then wake up next morning feeling cold and sick, by a roadside or in woodland with no memory of what really happened the previous night. Tylwyth Teg Ceirw is also claimed to be both responsible for planting of daffodils on roadside verges across Wales, and the rain and mist for which Wales is well endowed. Capturing one of these creatures is one of the main goals of the Society and members will often let themselves be used as bait to trap one, biding their time in a rural hostelry till it closes and then heading out into the darkness. So far all attempts have been unsuccessful, but they vow to continue. Naturally the picture is just an artist's impression. I think he has let his imagination take over a bit.

Also included is the Black Print souvenir sheet which was only available at StampArdd '58, the premier Welsh Stamp Exhibition of the time. Each one was individually numbered.