

Just a duck

As an amateur photographer, you may think so when you see a duck and you don't photograph it because you have done so X times in the past. But if you take the trouble to examine this attractive local letter more closely via philately, you will find many starting points for the subject. First of all, the stamp shows a so-called mallard (rum.: rata mare), a drake by the way; the species was described by Linnaeus in 1758, it is the ancestral form of our domestic duck. The two-circle stamp shows that of Sibiu (Hermannstadt) in Transylvania and advertises the zoological garden there. We see water, reeds and cannonball or bulrush (*Typha* sp.).



Now we have looked at the letter superficially; however, we should also look at who this stamp is dedicated to, namely John James Audubon (1785-1851). Raised in France, he wanted to escape military service under Napoleon and went to America. As a traveler, he travels widely, observing the birds and making elaborate drawings, taking a different approach from his contemporaries: he shoots the birds - often 100 a day - with fine shot so as not to damage them. With fine wires, he brings them into a natural position and then makes life-size drawings, which he paints in watercolor. Imagine the life-size images of a sea eagle! Audubon nevertheless managed to find a publisher for his work *The Birds of America*. His books are sold at auction today for several million US dollars.

What we do not see here is that mallards in particular have managed to be mentioned in various scientific articles concerning homosexuality in the animal kingdom (e.g. Bagemihl). Mass rapes of mallards are also reported in the literature (Schilthuizen). Mallard drakes have a short corkscrew-like penis, while drakes of the Argentine ruddy duck reach over 40 cm (McCracken A. 2001: *Science journal Nature*).

Further reading: Bagemihl B. 1999: *Biological Exuberance* in *New Scientist*. Schilthuizen M. 2014: *Darwin's Peepshow* - DTV.