

AviCulture - Bird Collectible Items

Do you have a growing collection of “bird things” around the house?

By Dick Schroeder

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We've all seen those silly plastic pink flamingos, or perhaps just the single one with the color faded to nearly white, standing in a sun-drenched front yard. That, my friends, is just one among a huge list of bird collectibles. Thankfully, most collectibles are more tasteful.

Photo Courtesy Nest

Nearly any item you can imagine – a lamp, a spoon or fork, a salad bowl, especially salt and pepper shakers – can be found either in the form of birds or with birds painted, etched or carved into them. All of these items are collectibles. Yet not all are in the same class as the plastic flamingos.

A recent eBay search for birds found 11,861 items. Of those, 2,849 were from the “collectibles” section. Some of the objects were for serious collectors. A series of eight Royal Doulton porcelain birds by Robert Jefferson listed a starting bid of \$18,950. A 19th-century ivory box, 8 inches tall and 4 inches in diameter with carved birds, was sold for \$5,000.

Most items of course, were less expensive, but it is amazing what is available if you collect “bird things.” Even some of the highly collectible items weren't too expensive, especially Lalique crystal birds. There were lots of them, and prices were all over the place. Also, there were wonderful pottery birds circa 1930 by Stangl – very collectible.

There are websites that specialize in bird collectibles. An interesting one with lots of plates and ceramic things is AntiqueBeak.com.

Stamp Collecting

Numerous countries produce stamps featuring their native birds. Websites such as www.birdtheme.org and www.bird-stamps.org provide tons of bird stamp information.

When browsing one site, I found 30 species of hornbills, 15 species of toucans and 18 different species of lorries, including some quite rare ones. Kiribati and French Polynesia have stamps depicting the Kuhl's lory, *Vini kuhlii*. The Philippines has a stamp with its only endemic lory, the Mt. Apo, or Mrs. Johnstone's lorikeet, *Trichoglossus johnstoniae*.

If you are thinking of collecting bird-related items, stamps might be the way to go. They certainly don't require much space.

Coin Collecting

Another interesting bird collectible can be found in the world of currency. Many countries have their native birds inscribed on their coins as well as their paper money. Even in the United States, we have quarters with a bald eagle. New Guinea, home of the beautiful bird of paradise, uses many of them on their currency. Nearby Australia has coins with emus as well as kookaburras.

Many Caribbean countries have birds on their currency. Jamaica has a quarter depicting a hummingbird, and the Bahamas has a pink flamingo on its dollar. Every coin in the British Virgin Islands features a bird on it. In Central America, Guatemala named its dollar after a beautiful native bird, the quetzal. Instead of paying 2 dollars per gallon for gas, you would pay 2 quetzals.

But I've only scratched the surface of bird coin collecting. Many countries have native birds on their coins and paper currency, and collecting most of them is quite inexpensive. As an example, a British farthing, with its native wren depicted, can be found in excellent condition for less than a dollar. As with the stamps, coin/currency collecting requires very little space.

Bird Houses

Another fun bird-related collectible is birdhouses. They come in all shapes and sizes, and most are pretty inexpensive. I have a few near the bird feeders in a special section of my garden. Most are just intended to be ornamental, but some house wrens have put a couple of them to good use.

I find them at swap meets online, and even in art galleries. Some are whimsical, others are silly (like those plastic flamingos), but many are quite lovely, or at least, interesting. You can do as I did, pick a spot in your yard, and just add new ones whenever you find something special. They'll make a great point of interest in your landscape.

The Unknown Collector

Many of you probably already are collecting bird-themed items without giving serious thought to it. For this column, I wandered around my house with my camera and was surprised how many bird collectibles I had accumulated over the years. Some I see every day, like the parrot cookie jar – a one-time table centerpiece at an installation dinner for the ASA (Avicultural Society of America). These days it houses sugar for the hummingbird feeders.

I found wine glasses and a salad bowl with hummingbirds etched into them, an old Christmas gift. There was also a chicken gravy boat used as decoration in a bookcase, some Mexican folk art and a postcard of the old aviary on Catalina Island, probably from the 1930s.

Some of the bird collectibles are on prominent display, like the gift from my mother: a plate painted with a man in a large birdcage and a starling-like bird standing outside laughing. My fiancée gave me a Phoenix carved in stone from the Chinese Han dynasty, which sits in my office bookcase. I never think about that stone as a collectible. Look around your home, I'll bet you are collecting bird items unconsciously too.