# SNAKES OF ZIMBABWE

Issued 12th July, 2005

*(Extracted from Philatelic Bureau Bulletin No 3 of 2005)*[2]

This issue depicts some of the better known snakes that can be seen in Zimbabwe. All of the snakes depicted are poisonous though the python can inflict a very painful bite which is in most cases very capable of turning sceptic. A good rule to follow is that few snakes will bite unless they are provoked or molested. The only occasion it is justified to actively hunt a snake is after it has bitten someone and a positive identification is needed to inject the correct anti-venom. The greatest majority of bites are from puff adders. Wearing boots with leather anklets are advisable when walking in the bush to give good protection against accidental bites. If this precaution became general practice, the incident of snake bites would be greatly reduced in Africa.

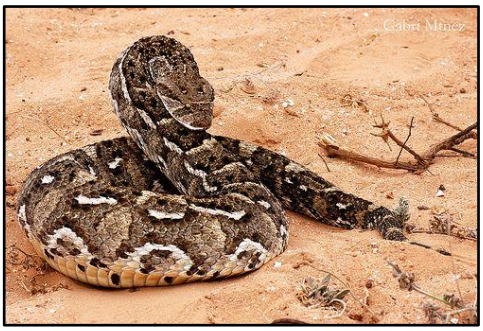


**$6,900: Egyptian, Banded or Bushveld Cobra**
*Naja haje annulifera.*

Most specimens have a dark brown or black band across the throat, a feature particularly conspicuous in juveniles. A banded phase also occurs, in which the dark dorsal surface of the body is regularly interspaced with narrower, light yellow crossbands. Typically, a savannah species, it occurs from sea level up to 1,500 metres. Its habitat is disused termitaria, hollow logs or rocky outcrops where they are used as retreats and provided it is not disturbed, the snake might remain in a particular area for many years.

It is largely nocturnal and will prey on toads, frogs, lizards, rodents, birds and their eggs as well as other snakes. One of the more famous fatalities of the Egyptian Cobra may have been Cleopatra, the Ancient Queen of Egypt, and daughter of King Ptolemy XII, who is reputed to have taken her own life with an Asp. The name Asp was the ancient Egyptian name for the Egyptian Cobra and it was well known that the bite from an Egyptian Cobra was far less painful than bites known as those adders known as Asps. While not overtly aggressive, when molested the Egyptian Cobra will rear and spread an impressive hood. A two metre specimen with the anterior 60 cm of its body raised and displaying a hood more than 12 cm wide, is an intimidating sight. Like most snakes its eyesight is not good and quite limited and should the molester retreat the Cobra will advance in the rearing position to maintain visual contact. To the uninitiated this appears to be a form of attack. When the Egyptian Cobra bites its victim, it hangs on and chews tenaciously, embedding its short front fangs in the flesh and injecting a relatively large quantity of neurotoxic venom. In humans the potent venom can cause death through respiratory failure. A polyvalent antivenom is produced by medical services in Zimbabwe which is effective. The Egyptian Cobra lays up to 25 eggs.

**$13,800: The Puff Adder**
*Bitis arietens arietens*



The Puff Adder is the most widely distributed venomous snake in Africa. The flat bluntly spade shaped head is distinct from the thick body which is covered with keeled scales. Its colour varies according to its distribution; generally, a drab looking snake. Females have short stubby tails in contrast to the long tapering tails of the males. Being heavy bodied and sluggish, the Puff Adder relies on immobility and cryptic camouflage to escape detection.

Consequently, animals and humans frequently tread close to or directly on this common snake as it basks in sun dappled patches along footpaths or in low shrubs. Before striking the Puff Adder often inflates its body and then exhales rapidly, emitting a loud hissing or puffing sound - hence its common name. During the daylight hours the Puff Adder usually lies under sand or amongst grass, emerging at night to hunt rodents. It lies in wait on a trail used by these animals and when one approaches it strikes swiftly, then pulls back and waits. The venom is potent and may kill a rat within seconds. Because of its sluggish nature and camouflage the Puff Adder is dangerous and probably accounts for more cases of snakebite in Africa than any other snake. The snake's rapid strike and large fangs effectively deliver large quantities of its potent venom which causes excessive swelling of the bitten limb, followed by severe necrosis and sometimes gangrene. The bite is extremely painful and the area takes a long time to heal. Females give birth to 20-50 young in midsummer.

**$20,000: Boomslang or Tree Snake**
*Dispholidus typus typus*

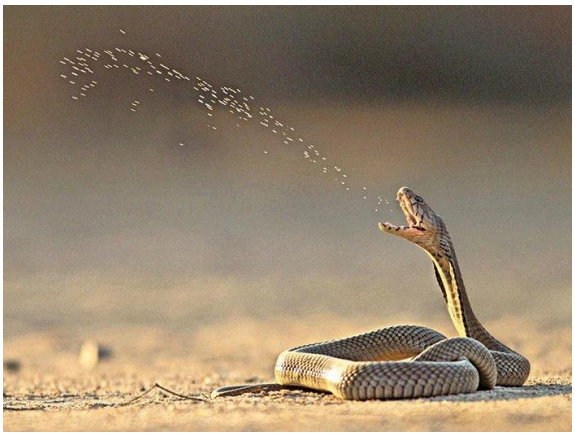


The Boomslang or tree snake is widely distributed throughout Africa south of the Sahara and Southern Africa., appearing in a number of morphs (colours) depending on age, gender and locality. Colours range from a flecked grey, through brown, almost black, black and yellow to green. Males are usually more brightly coloured than females. The diagnostic feature of the Boomslang, irrespective of colour is the eye which is the largest in proportion of all African snakes.

The rounded head is distinct from the moderately slender body and the dorsal scales are keeled. As its name implies, this is an arboreal species which preys largely on tree dwelling lizards such as agamas, geckos and chameleons, as well as fledglings and small rodents. However, the Boomslang may descend from its leafy domain and move over the ground or swim in pursuit of its prey. Once the prey is subdued the snake will always retire to the safety of a tree or shrub before it swallows its victim. Because of its docile temperament it was long thought to be a 'harmless' snake; however, under extreme provocation it inflates its throat and strikes out with mouth agape. This allows the Grooved backfangs, which are situated at the rear of the upper jaw to come into contact with the flesh of its victim. In humans, the venom is potently haemotoxic, causing extensive haemorrhaging of the mucous linings of the body. As internal bleeding continues large areas of the body will turn blue as a result of numerous clots beneath the skin and the kidneys can suffer irreparable damage. Death may occur some 3-5 days

afterwards if the necessary antivenom is not administered. A limited supply of Boomslang specific antivenom is available from the medical services in Zimbabwe on request by a Doctor treating an identified bite. The Boomslang lays 10-25 eggs during spring which hatch some 70-100 days later.

**$25,000: Mocambique Spitting Cobra or Imfezi**
*Naya mossambica*



A very common snake of the savanna and bushveld area, often seen in the vicinity of rural Kraals where the packed stone walls provide ideal retreats. It also utilises old termitaria and disused rodent holes. Though largely nocturnal in search of their prey which mainly consists of toads, other snakes, lizards, fledglings and rodents are also taken when available. Although it does rear and spread its hood in a typical cobra fashion and spit from this position. This species is also capable of spitting from the horizontal position large, and seemingly inexhaustable quantities of venom are directed towards the upper body of a human or attacker.

On entering the eyes, the potent cycotoxic venom instantly creates an intense burning pain that causes both eyes and nose to run profusely. Unless properly treated the eyes can become ulcerated resulting in partial to permanent blindness. Holding the eyelids open flush the eyes with any bland fluid that is available. Generally, water is the easiest to obtain but in desperation, a cold drink, tea, beer or even urine could be used. A doctor should be consulted as soon as possible. Besides spirting the imfezi can and will bite. This frequently happens when this snake enters rural dwellings where the inhabitants may be asleep on the floor and in rolling over, inadvertently squash the snake which retaliates by biting. As with other spitting cobras its venom causes localised pain and swelling followed by partial to severe necrosis around the bitten area. Depending upon the envenomation, tissue damage can occur along the bitten limb and even into the body. It can lay 10-22 eggs during the summer months.



**$30,000: Gaboon Viper**
*Bitis gabonica gabonica*

This snake is restricted to the forested low land forests of eastern Zimbabwe and northern Mozambique. It also occurs in Northern Kwazulu Natal in South Africa. This vividly coloured snake cannot be mistaken for any other. It has a wide buff coloured head distinct from its heavy body which is strikingly geometrically patterned in pastel shades that blend perfectly with the leaf litter of a forest floor and make this one of the most effectively camouflaged serpents in Africa.

Its diet consists mainly of rodents but has been reported as taking birds, mongooses and even monkeys on occasion. After an initial strike, the Gaboon Viper deeply embeds its enormous fangs into its victim. When the animal becomes inactive the snake uses its fangs and teeth to manipulate the prey into a head first position and then it slowly swallows it. The Gaboon Viper has the longest fangs (up to 4 cm) of any snake in the world, which enables it to inject massive amounts of its cycotoxic venom deep into its

victim. Prompt administration of adequate quantities of poltvalent antivenom is necessary to ensure survival. Broods of 10-13 young are born in late summer.

**$40,000: Black Mamba**
*Dendroaspis polylepsis*



Mamba is the longest venomous snake in Africa. The Black Mamba is extremely agile and very sinuous, even in large specimens the girth can be as thick as a man's wrist. The long coffin shaped head and charcoal to black mouth colouring are characteristic of this species. Its colouring is a dull olive, gunmetal or leaden in colour with occasional darker markings. An inhabitant of bushveld and tropical areas, it often holes up in termitaria, hollow tree trunks and rocky outcrops where it will stay indefinitely if undisturbed.

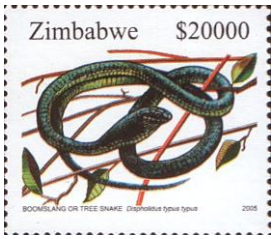
It can often be seen in the Mana Pools area of Northern Zimbabwe. It is also seen regularly in the Northern Botswana, Northern Transvaal and most of Mozambique. Dassies are a particularly favoured prey, but rodents and various game birds are also taken. Prey are struck only once and left to succumb to the potent neurotoxin before being eaten. It is a nervous and elusive species and fortunately, not many people come into contact with this snake. However, when confronted or cornered, a large angry Black Mamba is an awesome sight. Swaying gently, the anterior third of its body is raised almost to human shoulder height. With its jaws agape exposing the distinctive black mouth lining and its narrow hood extended the snake emits a low hollow sounding hiss. Even when on the move in this raised attitude, the black mamba can strike rapidly and repeatedly at its aggressor. The powerful nerve poison is injected into the victim in large quantities through the long front fangs. The onset of erratic heartbeat and respiratory failure is rapid and only prompt administration of copious amounts of anti-venom will ensure the victim's survival. 6-14 eggs are laid in midsummer, hatching about 2.5 months later.

## The Stamps



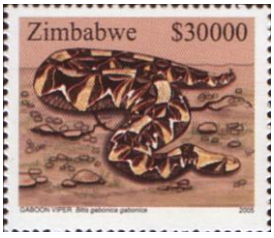




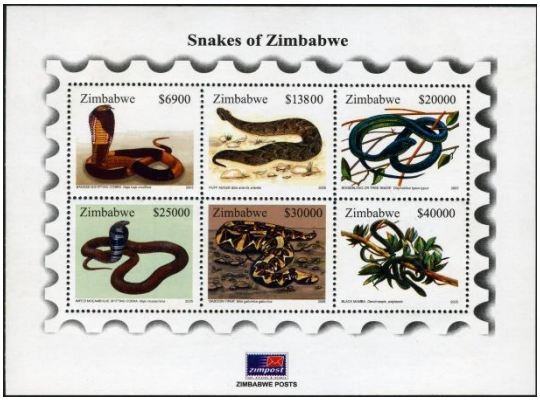











Reduced to 50% of size

## Catalogue listings

| SG | ZSC[1] | Value | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1160 | 585 | $6,900 | Egyptian Banded Cobra |
| 1161 | 586 | $13,800 | Puff Adder |
| 1162 | 587 | $20,000 | Boomslang or Tree Snake |
| 1163 | 588 | $25,000 | Mozambique Spitting Cobra |
| 1164 | 589 | $30,000 | Gaboon Viper |
| 1165 | 590 | $40,000 | Black Mamba |
| MS1166 | MS10 | | Se-tenant block of all six stamps to set |

## Technical details

**Stamp size:** Sheet stamps: 35 x 30 mm

**Sheet Size:** 50 stamps (10 rows of 5 stamps), two panes per printed sheet

**Artist:** Cedric Herbert

**Paper:** ZSC paper type J: paper described by Zimpost as "Chancellor Litho PVA Gummed Postage Stamp Paper". This paper is produced by Tullis Russell Coaters of Glenrothes, Fife, Scotland. Under UV there is no fluorescence either front or back, the stamp appears to be very dark

**Print colours:** Cyan, magenta, yellow & black

**Perforations**: SG 14½ x 14, ZSC 14¼ x 14
Top margin: Perforated through
Other margins: Imperforate

**Printer:** NatPrint, Harare, Zimbabwe

| | |
|---|---|
| **Printer's Imprint:** | Bottom Margin, below Row 10 Column 3. Imprint printed in black |
| **Cylinder numbers:** | Top margin above R1/1. Colours from left – cyan, magenta, yellow, black |
| **Colour register:** | Type TL 4– round boxed – left margin opposite R1/1. Colours reading down – cyan, magenta, yellow, black |
| **Sheet Value:** | Top margin, above R1/5, printed in black |
| **Sheet Number:** | Type SN 7 with printed 'ZIMPOST' prefix, right margin opposite R/5, reading down |

**Print numbers:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| $. 6,900 | 620,000 | $13,800 | 72,000 |
| $20,000. | 52,000 | $25,000 | 54,000 |
| $30,000. | 54,000 | $40,000 | 51,000 |
| Miniature sheet | 5,000 | | |

**Issue date:** 12th July, 2005

## Postal Rates

These postage rates reflected the air mail basic rates for local, Africa & Europe. The postal rates, effective from 1st December 2004, show the air mail basic rate for the rest of the world as $50,000. The local postal rate of $13,800 for weight of 20 to 100 grammes, quite why this value was included is unknown. Postal rates, however, increased 18 days after the release of this issue, none of the values would be in respect of basic rates. Possibly why the quantities printed were so limited.

The rates were increased from 1st August 2005 to $10,000 local; $50,000 Africa; $60,000 Europe: and $80,000 Rest of the World.

## Listed varieties

No listed varieties have been noted.

## Unlisted Varieties

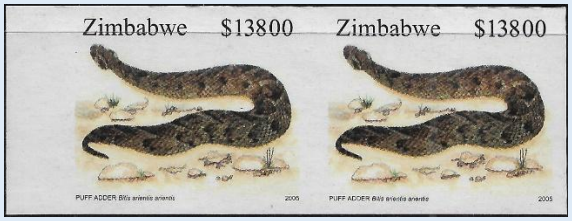
There are numerous small dots and specks in the printing of these stamps, particularly in the backgrounds.



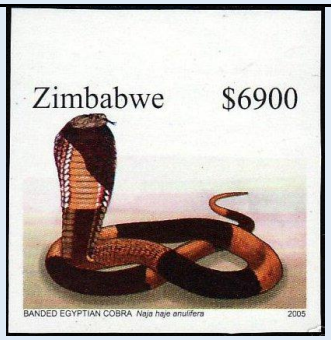

**$6.900:** Top two rows with top row imperforate to top. This is sheet no 0635, cylinder 1A. Also known on sheet nos. 0828 & 0839, also cylinder 1A.
*(Source rhodesia.co.za and Jefferson Ritson)*




**$6,900:** *Discolouring of printing over part of the snake's coils. R9/3*



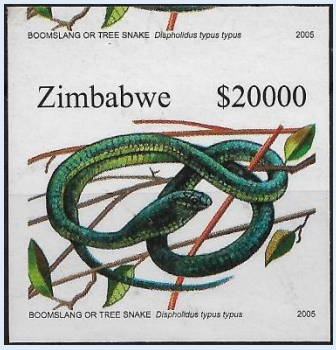

**$13,800:** Imperforate stamps, probably a proof
*(Source eBay May 2023)*



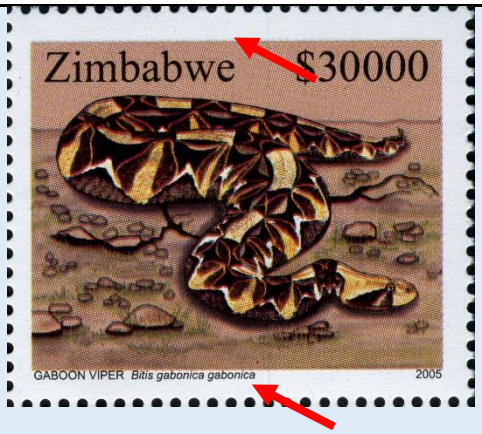

**$6,900:** Imperforate stamp, probably a proof.
*(Source – eBay)*



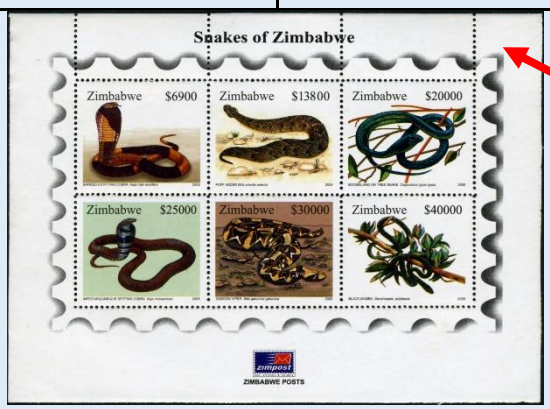

**$6,900:** Magenta ink clot with yellow halo. R9/5




**$20,000**: Miscut imperforate stamps, probably proof
*(Source eBay June 2022)*




**$30,000:** Very thin blue vertical line through middle of stamp. Column 1

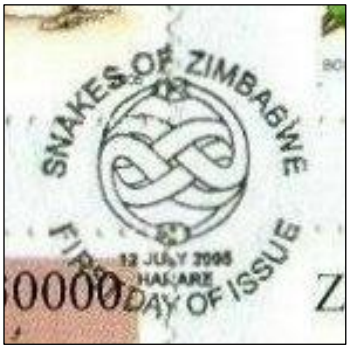



**Miniature sheet:** With additional vertical perforations through top margin

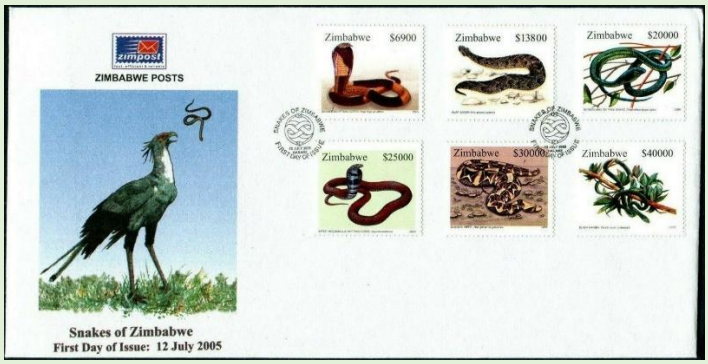
## First Day Cover

The cover numbering comes from the catalogue produced by Geoff Brakspear.

A pictorial first day of issue canceller was produced for this issued and was used by the Philatelic Bureau. Other first day cover cancellers continued to be used at main post offices.

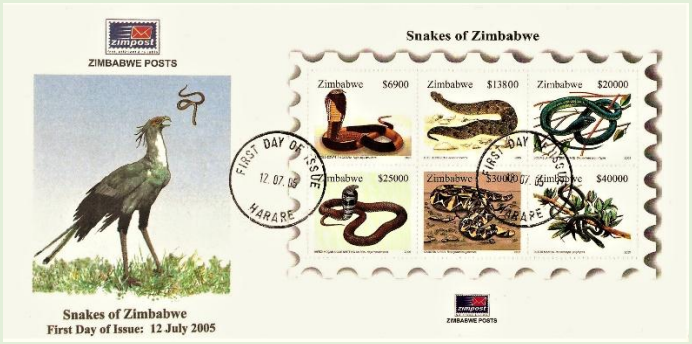


ZW114.1 (Zimpost)




Cover with set of stamps, placed on cover using Autophix machine and printed pictorial cancellation.
220 x 110 mm

ZW114.1 MS (Zimpost)



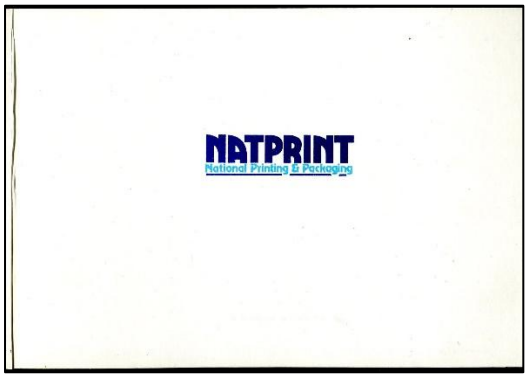

Miniature sheet with hand struck
First Day of Issue, Harare, cancellation for 12th July 2005
220 x 110 mm

## Related material.

### Natprint Proof Presentation Cards

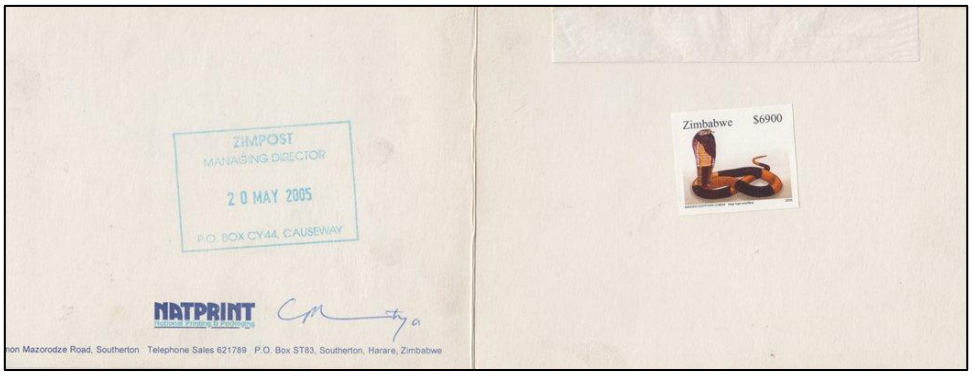
Presentation cards produced by Natprint with imperforate proofs of the stamps to be issued. The presentation cards were forwarded to the PTC for approval of the final product.

*(Courtesy of Jefferson Ritson)*

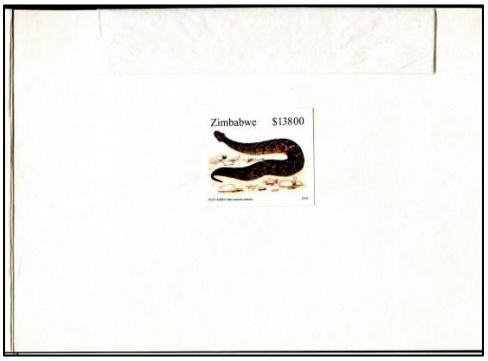




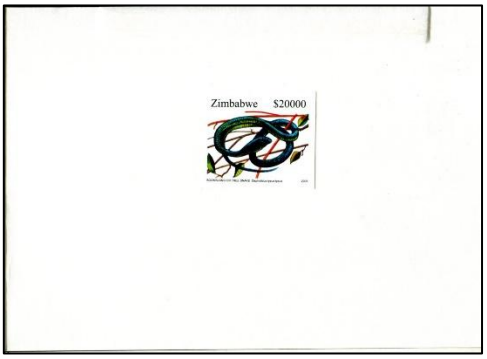

Front cover Inside front cover



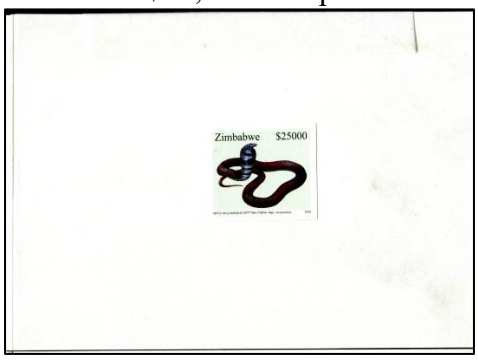

$6,900 stamp, approved 24 May 2005
*(Courtesy of Pat Flanagan)*



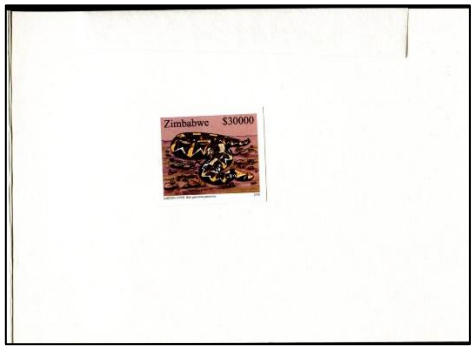

$13,800 stamp




$20,000 stamp




$25,000 stamp

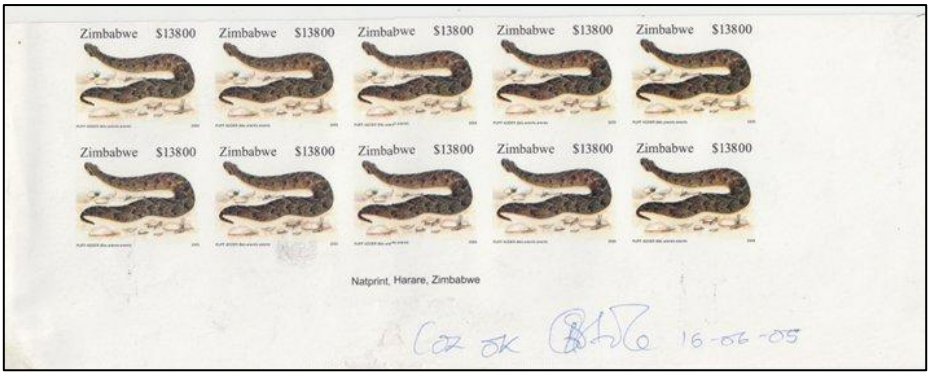



$30,000 stamp

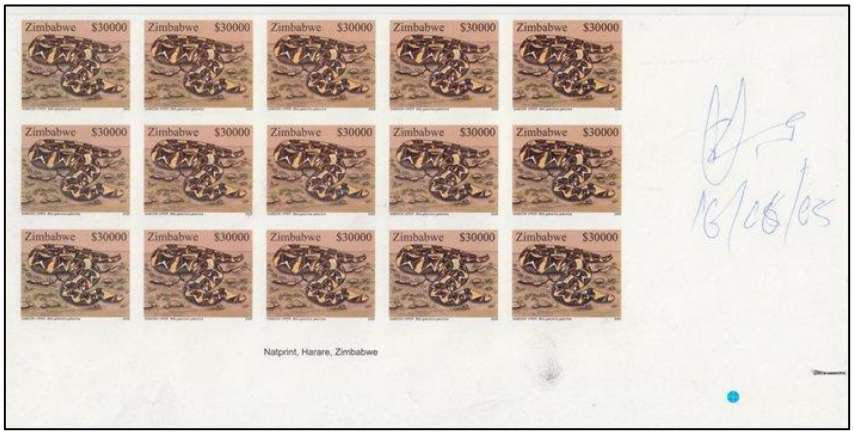



$40,000 stamp

**Later proof material**




$12,800 duty approved 16 June 2005
*(Courtesy of Pat Flanagan)*

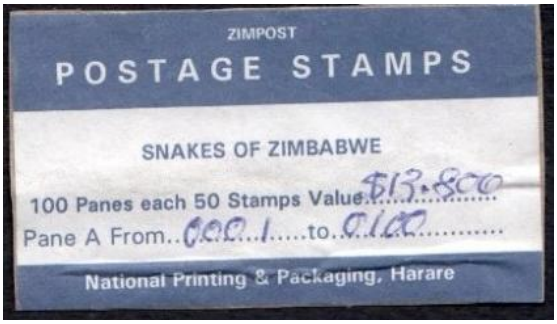


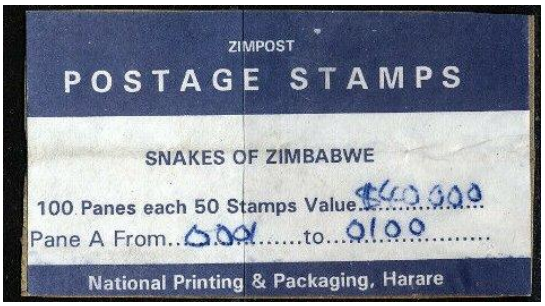

$30,000 duty approved 16 June 2005
*(Courtesy of Pat Flanagan)*

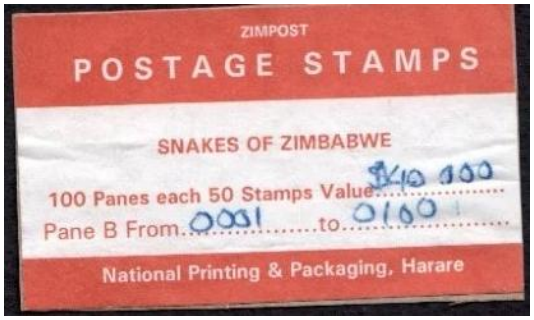
**Related material.**

**Related material.**

Delivery Labels from packaging containing sheets of 100 stamps. The two values represented below, with the Cylinder 1A sheets having blue labels and 1B brown labels. All labels are for sheet numbers 0001 to 0100. *(Source eBay)*






**Bibliography:**

1. "The Zimbabwean Concise Postage Stamp Catalogue", published by Harare Stamp Company, edited by Ken Allanson, Mike Amos and Geoff Brakspear. The catalogue continues to be updated and expanded by Geoff Brakspear
2. Zimbabwe Post, Philatelic Bureau Bulletin No 3 of 2005

| **Additions/Changes since December 2020** | |
|---|---|
| 8/2021 | $6,900: imperforate/proof |
| | $30,000: thin blue vertical line |
| 8/2022 | $20k miscut probable proof |
| 3/2023 | $6,900 signed presentation card |
| | $13,800 and $30,000 signed proofs |
| 8/2023 | $13,800 proof pair |
| 8/2026 | Additional delivery labels |