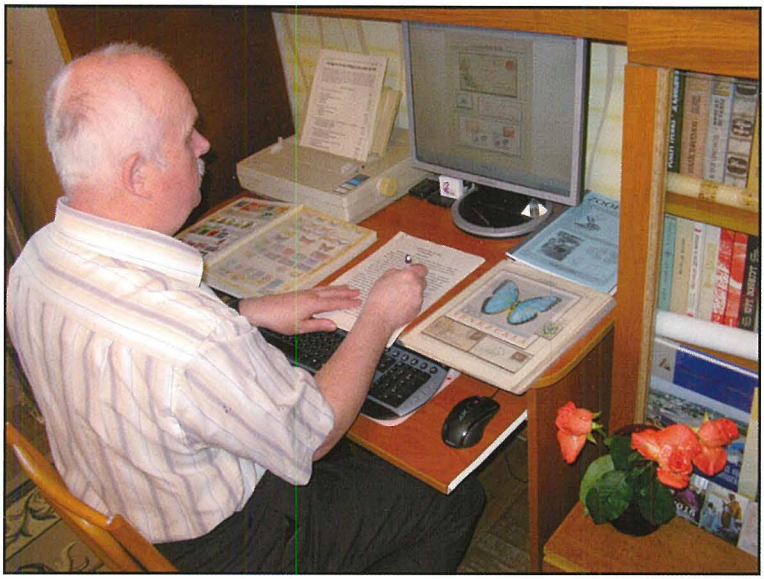

COLORFUL BUTTERFLY PEACOCK

Vladimir Kachan, Belarus

The European peacock with scientific name *Inachis io* is exquisite colorful butterfly among the many diversity of butterfly species in the worldwide and recorded from the island of Malta **(fig. 1)**.

Figure 1 – Stamp of Malta 2000 with butterfly Inachis io

The Peacock Butterfly is easily recognisable because it has a large 'eye spot' on each of its four wings **(fig. 2)**. Each eye spot is situated on the outer edge of each wing and all have bright blue markings inside. The eye spots have other colours inside them such as black, cream, orange and white. The eye spots look similar to the eye spots that can be seen on the tail of a Peacock. This is why this butterfly is called the 'Peacock Butterfly'.

Figure 2 – Pair stamps of Great Britain 1981 with color error

The main colour of the wings of the Peacock Butterfly is a brownish red colour with black markings. The tips of the wings are bordered with a light brown

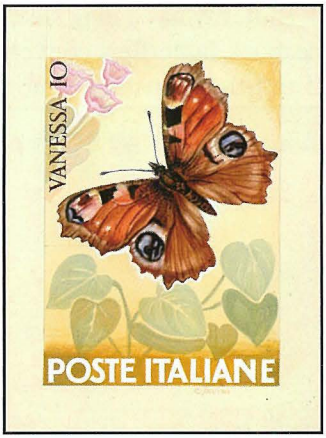

Figure 3 – Design 1960 from Italian painter Giovanni Savini

colour **(fig. 3)**. The Peacock Butterfly rests with its wings closed together in an upright position over its body. This position reveals the underside of the wings which is a dark brown colour. The dark underside acts as a good camouflage for the Peacock Butterfly when it rests or sleeps in dark places **(fig. 4)**.

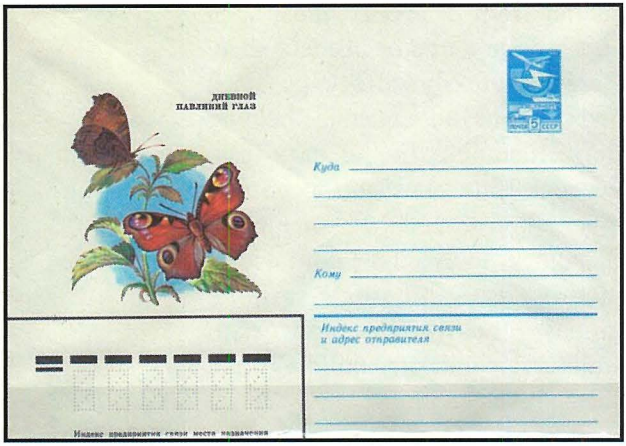

Figure 4 – Entire postal of USSR 1983

Figure 5 – Artwork of North Korea 1962

This species widespread in Europe and temperate areas of Asia **(fig. 5)**, and Japan. The Peacock Butterfly is quite a small butterfly and it has a wingspan of about six centimetres. Peacock Butterflies only fly during the day and sleep at night. Peacock Butterflies can be seen on flowery banks, roadside verges, in gardens, meadows, woods, orchards and in the countryside **(fig. 6)**.

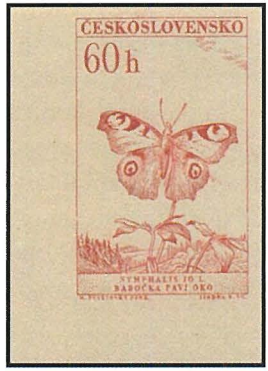

Figure 6 – Proof of Czechoslovakia 1961

Sometimes a Peacock Butterfly likes to bask in the sun and it can often be found sun-bathing on the ground with its wings open. When the sun vanishes behind a cloud, the Peacock Butterfly closes its wings and then opens them again when the sun comes back out **(fig. 7)**.

The Peacock Butterfly is most probably the longest-lived butterfly in Europe. It can live up to eleven months although it spends five to six months in

Figure 7 – Meter mark of Germany 1988

hibernation. Hibernation is the period when the Peacock Butterfly has a long sleep over winter. In the weeks leading up to hibernation, peacock butterflies convert some of their blood sugar into glycerol to act as a kind of anti-freeze in anticipation of the forthcoming cold period. Then the peacock finds a safe place with relatively constant temperatures and shelter from the cold winds, such as a hole in a tree or inside a shed. Here the butterfly will fold its wings and sleep, its dull underside helping it to disappear in the darkness. Peacock Butterflies start to go into hibernation around the beginning of September to avoid the cold winter months. They hibernate in large groups in hollow trees, crevices in walls and in unheated buildings like sheds, barns and lofts.

Figure 8 – Aerogramme of Great Britain 1997

Peacock Butterflies are one of the first species of butterflies to be first seen in spring. They are commonly seen in parks and gardens where there are lots of flowers **(fig. 8)**.

Peacock Butterflies often lay their eggs on nettle leaves. A shiny black caterpillar with lots of white spots all over its body emerges from each egg and each caterpillar has long black spines running along the sides and the top of its body. The caterpillar forms a chrysalis by spinning a silk case around itself. Inside the chrysalis the caterpillar transforms itself into a beautiful Peacock Butterfly **(fig. 9)**. The adult butterflies drink nectar **(fig. 10)** from a wide variety of flowering plants, including buddleia, willows, dandelions, wild marjoram, danewort, hemp agrimony, and clover; they also utilize tree sap and rotten fruit.

Figure 9 – Booklet of Estonia 2014

Figure 10 – Artwork of Tanzania 1995

The peacock butterfly is a gloriously vibrant addition to the spring scene **(fig. 11)**. To us the colourful eye-spots on its upper-wings, obviously reminiscent of a peacock, are simply beautiful but to the butterfly they are its primary means of defence. If a Peacock Butterfly feels threatened by a predator, like a bird, the Peacock Butterfly opens its wings and rubs the surface of its wings together to make a rasping or hissing sound. This threatening, hissing sound usually startles a bird momentarily. Also the sudden appearance of the eye spots on the Peacock Butterfly's wings can startle a bird. The bird thinks for a moment that the Peacock Butterfly is a larger animal because the spots on the wings look like eyes of an animal. When the bird is startled, the Peacock Butterfly tries to make a quick escape. If the Peacock Butterfly isn't fast enough, the bird looks at the wings again and then starts to attack them. The eye spots on the wings help to divert the attack away from the Peacock Butterfly's vulnerable body. A Peacock Butterfly is still able to fly even if chunks have been pecked out of its wings.

Figure 11 - Germany not accepted artist's design 1962 with butterfly Peacock

While hibernating in dark wintering areas, the peacock butterfly frequently encounters rodent predators such as small mice. Against these predators, however, the visual display of eyespots is ineffective due to the darkness of the environment. Instead, these rodent predators show a much stronger adverse reaction to the butterfly when it is producing its auditory hissing signal **(fig. 12)**. This indicates that for rodent predators, it is the auditory signal produced by the butterfly that serves as a deterrent.

I hope that my article with interesting facts about butterflies and illustrated by different types of philatelic materials will be stimulate interest of philatelists in philatelic Lepidoptera.

Figure 12 - Souvenir sheet of Gambia 2003

The Author is ready to help for philatelists in creating of philatelic exhibits on butterflies and moths. His address: Vladimir Kachan, street Kulibina 9-49, Minsk-52, BY-220052, Republic of Belarus, E-mail: vladimirkachan@mail.ru