

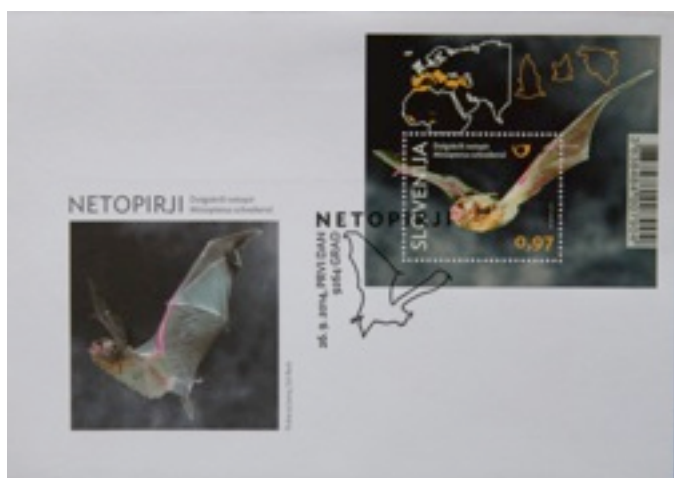
STAMPGATE: AN AUSTRALIAN BAT PHOTOGRAPH on a SLOVENIAN STAMP

Steve Bourne

Image my surprise when I received an email from a German stamp collector Wolf-Peter Friedrich asking for information on how and where I took the photo of a bent-winged bat *Miniopterus schreibersii* that was about to appear on a stamp in Slovenia! I had not given or sold the image for this purpose, and how did he know it was my photo? Wolf-Peter is an avid collector of stamps, specialising in stamps featuring bats. When a new bat stamp appears in any country, he likes to track down who took the image that the stamp is based on and source information on the photograph itself. He had received pre-release information on an upcoming series

of stamps by Slovenian Post which featured four stamps including one with *Miniopterus schreibersii*. Wolf-Peter had managed to match my photo with the stamp, and track me down. I thought this was pretty amazing, but what happened next could hardly be believed.

I mentioned the story to an ABC freelance journalist Peter Little at a function the following Saturday night. On Monday, another journalist contacted me and we produced a web article with the stamp and the original image under the title "Hey, who nicked my photo". The next morning the ABC had an email from Slovenian graphic designer Edi Berk advising he had designed the



The stamp, first day cover, and images used to create them. Reversing the image for the first day cover was a nice touch.

Photos: Steve Bourne



*Left. TV presenter and cameraman, Paul Makin with his soft toy bat that I had to photograph.
Right. L-R. Steve Bourne, Paul Makin and Naracoorte Caves Manager Deborah Carden in Blanche Cave after the filming.
Photos: Steve Bourne*

stamps but had not stolen the image, but merely used it in the design of the stamp. He felt it wasn't a copyright issue because the image had been computer-altered and asked to be put in contact with the photographer. Another stamp collector in Slovenia has a Google search for "Slovenia bat stamp" and had picked up the story and advised Slovenian media and it was the lead story on Slovenian news that night, featuring one of their most regarded professional photographers, but not Edi, who refused to front the cameras.

The ABC thought this was once again news worthy, so a four way radio interview with designer who had suffered similar theft and a copyright lawyer was held with national radio on prime drive time radio. The advice was it doesn't matter if the image has been altered in anyway; copyright is still retained by the image's owner.

Then the Slovenian media really picked it up. Radio interviews, requests from newspapers and websites and a series of emails with Edi Berk and even a request from a copyright lawyer to act on my behalf. I came to an agreement with Edi Berk that he would provide me with copies of the stamps and first day covers as compensation. He offered to do some graphic design work for a brochure or website as compensation, but the distance seemed too far to achieve this. I was somewhat disappointed when 4 stamps, 4 first day covers and a book he had designed on Slovenian craft arrived in the post; I was expecting a sheet of stamps at least. Eight euros worth of stamps and a book that will make a great Christmas present for my sister hardly seemed adequate compensation.

Procounter, a website that provides news for professional photographers, ran a story as well. The key message through all of this media was that I am Ok with images being downloaded for school projects and similar, but using images for profit without approval or compensation

is theft. Although these images have been sold several times previously, all funds have gone towards bat research, which just added more fuel to the story for the media.

Just when I thought it had died down, Paul Makin from Today Tonight, Channel Seven in Adelaide made contact, tipped off by Peter Little, the journalist I originally told the story. A story was filmed in Blanche Cave at Naracoorte Caves, complete with a fake hand puppet and me imitating taking photos of bats, which was nothing like how good bat photos are taken. I was attending the ISCA Congress at Jenolan Caves when this screened and missed it, but judging by the number of text messages and phone calls, plenty didn't. I have since seen the story and in a funny sort of way gave good publicity to Naracoorte Caves. The URL follows for your amusement. <http://www.todaytonightadelaide.com.au/stories/bat-man>

And then for a nice piece of symmetry to whole saga, I did a summary story for the ABC website on all the media that was generated by this issue. I think it's over.....I am quite sure Edi Berk will not be sending me a Christmas card.

