

Small Categories Series

Turkeys

Despite the fact that your average turkey has to be the ugliest creature on the face of this planet, it doesn't look half bad in a multicolor drawing on a matchcover. I must not have been the first to notice this, however, since some collectors already collect them as a distinct category.

In fact, I happen to have it on good authority that turkeys are near and dear to one local collector's heart. He even named his dog "Turkey" when it happened to be born on Thanksgiving. Not all that surprising when you consider that Ben Franklin had argued in favor of making the Turkey the national symbol of the United States rather than the American Eagle.

OK, let's start talking turkey! Its scientific name is *Meleagris gallopavo* from Latin *gallus*, meaning cock, and *pavo*, meaning chicken-like. "Meleagris" is the Roman name for guineafowl, suggestive of the early confusion of the turkey with guineafowl. The domestic turkey is descended from wild turkeys originally native to Southern Ontario, parts of the U.S. and Mexico. The turkey was tamed by the American Indian cultures in Mexico and taken from Mexico to Europe by Spanish conquistadors early in the 16th century. By 1524, the turkey is known to have reached England and, by 1558, it was becoming popular at banquets in England and throughout Europe. When English settlers came to North America, they brought the domesticated turkey back and used it as breeding stock with native wild turkeys. Chester Crill had amassed 93 of the little critters as of 1999!

