

Funny and Weird: Animal Teamwork [A2]

Senza dubbio la terminologia dei nomi collettivi degli animali non è indispensabile nello studio dell'inglese, tant'è che la maggior parte dei madrelingua non la conosce. In ogni caso è divertente scoprire la relazione fra i nomi e le caratteristiche proprie di ogni specie.



Animal group names, or collective [nouns](#) for animals, are specific words used to describe a collection of animals of the same [kind](#). You are probably familiar with a number of them: for example, a group of wolves or dogs that hunt together is [called](#) a '[pack](#)'. The term '[swarm](#)' is commonly used for a large group of insects, such as a [swarm](#) of bees or [locusts](#). A group of fish that stay together for social reasons is [called](#) a '[shoal](#)' and, if they are swimming in the same direction in a coordinated manner, is [called](#) a '[school](#)'. When we talk about a large group of animals, especially [mammals](#) with [hooves](#), we refer to them as a '[herd](#)' (a [herd](#) of cows or a [herd](#) of buffaloes, for example). In the case of birds, the collective term is '[flock](#)', as in 'a [flock](#) of [geese](#)'. A group of big cats is a 'pride', while a group of domesticated cats is [called](#) a 'clowder' or a 'glaring'. And a group of newborn puppies or kittens is referred to as a '[litter](#)'. When it comes to whales, dolphins or [porpoises](#), we call them a 'pod'.

THE BOOK OF ST. ALBANS

So, why are names in the animal kingdom often so weird or funny? One reason is that many originated in medieval times, and were linked to the English hunting tradition. Some are traced to The Book of St. Albans, a 1486 treatise that includes a list with collective nouns for animals; similar lists were also compiled led throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. Many of these terms are still in use today, although they now seem bizarre. Some suggest traits of an animal (a 'tower' of giraffes or a 'leap' of leopards). They may evoke images, or sounds, or feelings and try to capture an animal's personality. Some come from old English words that are no longer in use.

A MESS OF IGUANAS

An 'army' of caterpillars or ants is probably derived from the behaviour exhibited by these very well organised insects when they move in large groups. A 'bask' of crocodiles is likely referring to their habit of basking in the sun on riverbanks. A 'murder' of crows is probably based on old superstitions of crows being omens of bad luck. A 'parade' of elephants is a very evocative description of a group travelling huge distances led by the oldest female. A 'flamboyance' of flamingos is a perfect homage to these brightly-coloured birds. A 'band' of gorillas is a clear reference to a military term. A 'bloat' of hippopotamuses is an obvious allusion to their large, bloated bellies, whereas a 'mess' of iguanas is a reference to their social habits, as they lie intertwined. A 'cackle' of hyenas is an evident reference to the raucous sound of their laughter, while a 'shadow' of jaguars captures their amazing camouflage skills.

A PRICKLE OF PORCUPINES

A group of moles is called led a 'labour' because of the small mammals' hard-working nature in digging tunnels. The playful nature of mice has earned them the collective term of 'mischievous'. Otters floating in water in a large group are called led a 'raft'. A 'parliament' of owls is maybe so named because of their legendary wisdom. A 'pandemonium' of parrots is an irresistible

description of their chaotic and noisy habits. A 'prickle' of porcupines is an apt reference to their quills. An 'unkindness' of ravens reflects a moral judgment on their uncaring behaviour as parents or of their being scavengers (feeding on corpses of dead animals). A 'crash' of rhinoceroses likely originated from the sound made by a charging group. A 'shiver' of sharks is suggestive of the fear they cause or perhaps of the fact that most of them are cold-blooded. And what about an 'ambush' of tigers? It is certainly a befitting name to describe the feeling of being suddenly surrounded by these fierce, splendid beasts! Of course, there's one group of 'animals' that we haven't covered yet: human beings. Can you think of one or more names suitable for this group?

Glossary

- **school** = banco
- **raucous** = rauco, sguaiato
- **owls** = civette
- **uncaring** = indifferente
- **suddenly** = improvvisamente
- **hooves** = zoccoli
- **parrots** = pappagalli
- **unkindness** = cattiveria, scortesia
- **pack** = branco, muta
- **flock** = stormo
- **weird** = strani
- **treatise** = trattato
- **led** = condurre
- **laughter** = risata
- **Otters** = nutrie
- **shiver** = brivido
- **mammals** = mammiferi
- **litter** = cucciolata
- **traced** = trovare, localizzare
- **omens** = presagio
- **flamboyance** = sfarzo
- **throughout** = nel corso
- **basking** = crogiolarsi
- **geese** = oche
- **parade** = sfilata
- **bloated** = gonfiarsi
- **surrounded** = circondare
- **suitable** = idonei
- **mischief** = birichinata
- **quills** = aculei
- **scavengers** = saprofaghi
- **fierce** = feroci
- **nouns** = sostantivi

- **porpoises** = marsuini
- **moles** = talpe
- **porcupines** = porcospini
- **raft** = zattera
- **behaviour** = comportamento
- **bellies** = pance
- **mess** = pasticcio, confusione
- **intertwined** = intrecciare, mischiare
- **digging** = scavare
- **shoal** = banco
- **no longer** = non più
- **feeding** = alimentarsi
- **ambush** = imboscata
- **riverbanks** = rive del fiume
- **apt** = adeguato
- **kind** = tipo
- **swarm** = sciame
- **linked** = legare
- **traits** = tratti
- **leap** = saltare
- **locusts** = locuste, cavallette
- **army** = esercito
- **skills** = abilità
- **befitting** = adatto
- **ants** = formiche
- **shadow** = ombra
- **mice** = topi
- **herd** = mandria
- **prickle** = aculeo, formicolio
- **caterpillars** = bruchi
- **whereas** = mentre
- **lie** = giacere
- **cackle** = risata, schiamazzo
- **wisdom** = saggezza