

COLLECTIVE NOUNS OF ANIMALS IN ENGLISH

It's a jungle out there!

It was high noon, in the summer, the sun seemed to have chosen me and me alone to shine on, I was trudging through the tall grass in the savannah, sweating and cursing myself for being so stupid as to have chosen Africa for a vacation, but then I decided I might just as well have a little fun and play a language game, trying to remember the collective nouns for the various groups of animals that kept passing before my eyes. But now I'm afraid I can't remember them all. Can you help me? Just fill in the blanks and enjoy the game, too. I'll give you a few tips so you can get to the right word. Ready? Come with me on this "incredible journey through the English collective noun jungle".

First I saw a 1 ... of cows (you know that one, don't you? It rhymes with bird), then a 2 ... of sheep (you know that one, too, of course, it rhymes with rock), then a 3 ... of fish (in the water, of course!) (students go there, supposedly to learn something), then I was amazed to see the number of ants crawling on the ground just ahead of me. It was a real 4 ... of ants (a collection of soldiers, together with a country's navy and air force, it makes up the armed forces), I looked at the sky and saw a 5 ... of grasshoppers (this word is basically used to refer to a gray mass of very small drops of water in the sky; it rhymes with crowd) and a 6 ... of birds (this one is easy, it has to do with wings and it rhymes with fight). I couldn't recognize what kind of birds they were but then I heard a typical loud sound and I saw a lot of crows on the ground. It was really a 7 ... of crows, I had never seen so many of them cawing together. (another name for "the crime of killing someone deliberately" and one of those crazy choices the English language has made when naming collective nouns; what has "assassination" have to do with a lot of crows? But the word is not assassination, it starts with an m and rhymes with herder). You find that strange? Then brace yourself ... we're gonna meet some real strange collective nouns for animals. I was near a river (I know, I know, you can't find sardines in a river, but please make an exception) and I saw a 8 ... of sardines (your parents, your siblings, your children and yourself: a group of people who live together [not always...] and are related to one another) but when I looked at the riverbank I got really scared. I had never seen so many crocodiles together, it was a real 9 ... of crocodiles (it has to do with the verb to intrude, it means something that interrupts a peaceful situation or a private event and it rhymes

with inclusion or with confusion). Got it? An intrusion of crocodiles? English is indeed a crazy language! After that I saw a 10 ... of wild dogs (that's common and easy, it rhymes with back), a 11 ... of elephants (a funny choice for a collection of elephants, probably associated with the myth that elephants have a great ability for remembering things. So does your computer). Got it? Then I saw a 12 ... of goats (that word is commonly used to refer to a large group of related families who live in the same area, like the Native American nations; the word rhymes with bribe), a 13 ... of gorillas (you use that word to refer to a group of musicians, like the Beatles; it rhymes with land, and a 14 ... of kangaroos (soldiers, especially in large numbers; the word rhymes with group) (I know, I know, what were those kangaroos doing in Africa? I'm not sure, but they had probably been left there by mistake, some trouble with Nature's GPS...).

By that time I was sick and tired of all those animals and their collective nouns, but the whole thing was not over yet. I kept seeing groups of animals, and now their collective nouns were really a weird linguistic choice. Please don't give up ... and brace yourself, the worst is still to come...

I heard a noise and looked around. Lots of rhinos were crashing against each other. It was a 15 ... of rhinos, I'd never heard such a racket before. (a loud noise like the sound of two hard things hitting each other and breaking; the word rhymes with cash). Then I saw a lot of tigers together. (I know, there are no tigers in Africa, but please let me tell you the story, it's only a story...) It was what? An 16 ... of tigers? (An attack from a hidden position; the word rhymes with rosebush). You say a pride of lions and an ambush of tigers. English, a crazy language. But we're not done yet. I saw a 17 ... of parrots (an organization that makes or sells goods for money or that provides services; used in another context, the word means "people you are with", if you keep company with someone, you spend time with someone. What else did I see? Well, just a few more. I saw a 18 ... of giraffes (giraffes are tall, granted, so if you are lucky enough to see a group of giraffes together you see something that reminds you of Paris ... or Pisa ...; the word rhymes with power). And now, coming to the theme of politics and politicians, I saw a 19 ... of salamanders (maybe because those animals are supposed to withstand fire ... and if you mean the Brazilian Congress, maybe it has to do with fire from hell) and I saw a 20 ... of owls. A what? Yes, true. I saw a group of owls (large birds with a big head and eyes, supposedly known to be wise), an English word that means an official elected group of politicians who meet to make the laws of the country.

And finally I saw a collection of gnus, also called wildebeests, African wild animals, a type of antelope with curved horns. There were lots of them together, so what did I see? An implausibility of gnus. Got that? Crazy language.

OK, have a look at the answer key, check your own answers and find out your score.

1. herd 2. flock 3. school (apparently a corruption of shoal) 4. army 5. cloud 6. flight 7. murder 8. family 9. intrusion 10. pack 11. memory 12. tribe 13. band 14. troop 15. crash 16. ambush 17. company 18. tower 19. congress 20. parliament

After that implausibility of gnus, I guess it was time to wake up. I opened my eyes, sat up and realized I had been lying on a little book called "Animal Collective Nouns", which I probably had read before falling asleep.

Well, that's what happens when you have nothing really important to do...

I hope you enjoy adding some of those crazy collective nouns to your Useless Info.

If not, I'll ask an intrusion of crocodiles to haunt your dreams...