

BIOLOGY

Animal Name-Calling

An exciting quiz and story on the strange and curious names man has given to his furred and feathered friends. Males, females and young often have different names.

By HOWARD SIMONS

► PEAS, as we all know, come in pods. But so do walruses and whales.

Human beings travel on trips, but seals travel in trips.

This is not double-talk, or a play on words, but two examples of the many seemingly strange group names man has assigned to his furred and feathered friends. A school of fish and a herd of cattle are familiar group names. Perhaps a pod of whales and a trip of seals are not as familiar, but they are, nevertheless, very correct English.

By the same token, man has taken it upon himself to assign a different name for the male, female and young of the many animals that inhabit the earth with him.

Sometimes, more than one group name has been applied to the same animal. The fabled whale, for example, when found in numbers can be referred to as a gam or a pod or a herd.

The reverse is true too. A flock can mean lions in Africa, sheep in Australia, goats in Ireland and geese in the United States.

Huntsmen Helped

Historically, the professional huntsmen of England during the Middle Ages probably contributed more to the popularization of animal name-calling than any other single group. It was the professional huntsmen who provided game for English tables, and the same professional huntsmen who provided the specific group name for English game.

As their counterparts the world over, the early English hunted and fished more for food than fun. Game was considered part of the country's natural resources.

For these tradesmen of wood and field throughout the world, an animal was not just an animal and a bird a bird. Each species had a sex and an age. Group names and individual names that spelled out sex and age became the huntsmen's "shop talk," his vocational vocabulary.

To many, where a deer was just a deer, it was a doe or a buck or a fawn to the professional, and it still is today.

At the time the huntsmen were busy, another curious thing was taking place in England involving the animals and their relationship to human beings. The English farmer was evolving a unique vocabulary for animals, all his own.

In rustic, agricultural England, animals and birds were too much a part of the every-

day life to be called by their traditional and proper names. A closeness to nature and a closeness between man and animal led the English common people to express their feelings in much more intimate terminology.

They gave first, or given, names to their little friends.

Bouncy squire rabbit became Jack rabbit and crafty Mr. crow, Jim crow. Little Miss wren became known as Jennie and old Mr. Daw, Jack. Likewise, the sparrow was christened Phillip and the kit, Tom.

With time, these personal names began to stick and many are still well-used today. In some cases, the proper name for a species became indistinguishable from its combination with a given first name. It is rare today to hear Mrs. Maggie called just plain pie.

And how many people realize the har-binger of spring was originally known only as the "red breast." Its first name has all

but become its only name and we all know him as Robin.

Folk habits often become part and parcel of the nation itself. This is certainly true of one given name that the early English farmer used around the farm, for today it symbolizes England itself—John Bull.

However, group names are not the only way man refers to animals. With the possible exception of crossword puzzle workers and a few learned specialists, most names of the male, female and young of animals remain a remote and foreign area of information.

Another exception in this area of knowledge is Francis H. Elmore, who is now parkway naturalist at the National Park Service's Natchez Trace Parkway in Mississippi. Mr. Elmore has devoted much time and study to the terms used to describe the individuals of animal groups.

Mr. Elmore points out that, just because the male and female of the walrus are called a bull and a cow, it can not be assumed the young will be called calves. They might be pups, he says, as with the seal, whale and sea lion, or cubs, as with the shark and whale.

The word kitten, Mr. Elmore tells us,



A TRIP OF SEALS—Man travels on trips but seals travel in trips. A trip of seals is a group of seals. This trip of fur seals live on Gorbach Rookery, St. Paul Island, Alaska. Groups of seals are also known as pods. The young seals looking wistfully at the camera are pups, watched over by cows. Male seals are known as bulls and young seals can also be identified as whelps, bachelors, belamers and half bulls.

can mean the young of the skunk, rabbit, otter, hare, beaver, ocelot, cougar or bobcat. And a squealer is not a young pig, but a young quail.

The same odd rules for the game of animal name-calling that apply to the young also apply to the males and the females of a species. Hen, to most persons, means a female chicken. But, it can also mean the female of fish and lobsters as well as the female canary. The bull and the cow can refer to the father and mother terrapin.

Fortunately, he-bear and she-bear are self-explanatory.

Obviously, Mr. Elmore is an expert in his hobby. How much of an expert are you? There are 50 questions. For each correct answer (see p. 381) allow yourself two points. If your score is 90 or above, you are an expert.

Group I

GIVE THE GROUP NAME OF THESE ANIMALS

(Example: Bees—Swarm)

- 1. Nightingales; 2. Elk; 3. Rooks; 4. Foxes; 5. Buffaloes; 6. Ants; 7. Quail; 8. Wolves; 9. Grouse; 10. Peacocks

Group II

NAME THE ANIMAL OF EACH OF THESE GROUP NAMES

(Example: Pod—walrus)

- 1. nide; 2. sounder; 3. shoal; 4. wisp; 5. cast; 6. siege; 7. stand; 8. plump; 9. flock; 10. gaggle

Group III

NAME THE FEMALE OF THESE ANIMALS

(Example: Sheep—ewe)

- 1. bison; 2. fox; 3. goat; 4. owl; 5. swan; 6. hog; 7. tiger; 8. whale; 9. horse; 10. rabbit

Group IV

NAME THE MALE (Example: Bee—drone)

- 1. alligator; 2. bobcat; 3. coyote; 4. deer; 5. duck; 6. mountain goat; 7. goose; 8. skunk; 9. termite; 10. woodchuck

Group V

NAME THE YOUNG (Example: bear—cub)

- 1. beaver; 2. chimpanzee; 3. clam; 4. elephant; 5. fly

-; 6. frog; 7. mink; 8. ostrich; 9. rhinoceros; 10. zebra

Science News Letter, June 16, 1956

MEDICINE

See Cats Helping Diabetes Study

➤ CATS can serve humanity by helping doctors learn more about human diabetes, it appears from a report by Drs. J. Buse, K. Gundersen and F. D. W. Lukens of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, at the American Diabetes Association meeting in Chicago.

When cats are given a synthetic chemical related to anti-arthritis cortisone, they get diabetes, the Pennsylvania scientists found.

The cats develop ravenous appetites and fat bellies, and their limbs get very thin. The diabetes is very mild and slow in developing. These features of the cat disease, the scientists pointed out, should make it especially useful for learning more about the kind of diabetes, with overeating and obesity, that develops in humans.

The synthetic chemical producing the diabetes in the cats is 9 alpha-fluorohydrocortisone.

Science News Letter, June 16, 1956

MARINE BIOLOGY

Eels Travel by Last-Quarter Moon

➤ WHEN THE HARVEST MOON reaches its last quarter, it shines on thousands of eels swimming toward their mating ground in the Sargasso Sea.

The eels do not depend on the moon for its light. The long, snakelike fish migrate on cloudy nights as well as under clear skies, according to the State Fishery Research Institute of Holland. But the mature fish do migrate mostly at night, and their travels are pretty much confined to the times when the moon is showing its last yellow slit, the Institute said.

Eels in countries bordering the Atlantic all travel the long journey to the Sargasso Sea, where they mate and die. When the eggs hatch, the young fish make the return trip up the rivers, which usually takes several years.

Evidence suggests that the intensity of eel migration from Holland may be affected by very small earth tremors called microseisms.

Depressions under the North Sea cause these tremors at intervals of about three seconds. Investigations conducted on 1,000 fishing days showed the three-second effect was followed by increased eel catches.

Science News Letter, June 16, 1956

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