

# Collective Nouns for British Birds.



A baldmonkeyseenabird Article

Collective nouns are a quirk of the English language. Without having done any research on the subject, I feel fairly confident in asserting that no other language does collective nouns. Just English. And Scotch. Because Scotch is basically English anyway. I had an uncle who was Scotch. I couldn't understand a word he said. Amongst the most fascinating collective nouns in English are those given to birds. Some of them are self-explanatory; a septennial privy of avocets, a mechanical knife of woodpeckers and a fleapit pseudonym of skylark are prime examples. However, many have somewhat more interesting origins which I am going to tell you about now because I am ace.

## An Indivisible Six Of Auks

Auks are the only seabird that can't do maths well. They are so bad at maths that they probably say "math" like a stupid person. They don't even know that two times three is six. It is for this reason that all scientists and rational people agree auks should be mocked mercilessly via the medium of their own collective noun.



*A murdoch of crows*

## A Murdoch Of Crows

There is an amount of debate about the origin of the crow's interesting collective noun. A popular, but almost certainly incorrect theory, is that the "Murdoch" in question is Rupert Murdoch; the corrupt filth-smith. Presumably this is because crows, like Rupert Murdoch, are considered to be evil. However, this is a gross misconception; crows hardly ever dance around their offices squealing with delight because they have managed to stand in the way of a police investigation into the death of a schoolchild. In fact, crows do a lot of work for charity. Far more likely is that this is a reference to Murdoch from off of the A-Team due to the crows' habit of wearing a baseball cap back-to-front.

## A Sneeze Abscess Of Tits

This phrase originated with a mistake by Gilbert White. He thought he was filling out a form explaining the reason he wanted a divorce from his unpleasantly diseased wife when in fact he was filling in a form suggesting collective nouns for the Royal Sciencers Club. Which is why he never got a divorce. Or a marriage.

## A Stocking Of Buntings

In the mid-sixteenth century much of the day's fashion was led by a King who was Henry 8. And Henry Eight was a mental who was obsessed with his dream of flight. Thus, therefore, so it was that he stuffed his stockings full of snow buntings and jumped off the ramparts of Hampton Court. He did not achieve his dream but there were two important side effects. First, he accidentally beheaded his wife and reformed the church on the way down. Second, he inspired a fashion which survives to this day; stuffing buntings up your socks. Hence the collective noun.



*A plentymuch of lapwing*

## A Jovial Of Dunnock

This is an unusual example of a collective noun, in that it is more descriptive of people observing the bird than the bird itself. Any birdwatcher worth his salt knows of the joy brought about by watching a dull brown bird dullishly dull about in a dull shrub. Indeed, I find myself incredibly jovial every time I think I've seen a good bird and it turns out to be a dunnock.

### Some Examples of British Bird Collective Nouns

A daytime chatshow of mistlethrush.

A mistake of owls.

A colonoscopy of finches.

A defilement of little egrets.

A flatulence of bramblings.

A homunculus of godwits.

A death blow of plovers.

A disappointment of pigeons.

A plentymuch of lapwing.

A stocking of buntings.

A miscalculation of griffons.

A murdoch of crows.

A flounce of swans.

A mucus of pheasant.

A repugnance of spoonbills.

An assertive flaw of buzzards.

A meretricious vein of oystercatchers.

A septennial privy of avocets.

A gristle of dotterel.

A dismantled quarry of knots.

A personal problem of dunlin.

A despondent washing of phalarope.

An unbelievable soothsayer's head of skua.

A grease adjustment of gulls.

A poodle abrasion of terns.

An indivisible six of auks.

A jovial of dunnock.

An effeminate of hoopoe.

A no of bearded tits.

A mechanical knife of woodpeckers.

A fleapit pseudonym of skylark.

A hessian flute of swallows.

A probe of kingfishers.

A permanent narcissus of wagtails.

A tall birthright of rock pipits.

A bee-sting orphan of waxwing.

A gusset of whinchat.

A ming-trail of wheatear.

A sneeze abscess of tits.

A drainage of ring-necked parakeets.



*A colonoscopy of goldfinches*