



A Gathering Of Birds...

A Colony Of Gulls...A Parliament Of Owls...A Raft Of Cormorants

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The assignment of unusual descriptors for gatherings of various species of birds comes to us mostly from England. Some of these descriptions appear as early as circa 1500 CE. Some are rarely used today, while others are relatively well known. A number of writers looking for fresh and interesting attention grabbing titles and subjects have been bringing awareness of, and renewed interest in these thought-provoking designations.

Over the next few months, we'll have some fun exploring the origins of many of these interesting terms and how they came to be. If you are a bird lover, nature and/or history enthusiast or just curious about your environment, we think you will enjoy learning about this as much as we did.

A Colony Of Gulls

In Florida, you will see gulls wherever you go. There are more than 50 different species of gulls worldwide and more than two dozen in North America alone. Almost all gulls nest in large groups forming colonies. They will colonize large rock outcroppings, sea cliffs, beaches, small islands; sometimes numbering in the thousands. Even if they are a migrating species, they will return to the same roost year after year with their lifelong mates. Hence, the well-earned name for these gatherings of gulls...A Colony of Gulls.

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A Murder of Crows

The ominous phrase used for a gathering of crows is, A Murder of Crows...but, why? Historically, crows have been unjustly laden with negative reputations and superstitions originating in literature, folklore, mythology and misguided interpretations of their natural instincts. This designation comes to us mostly from two different stories: Superstitious folklore tales claim that groups of crows would hold tribunals when members of their flock transgressed. If found guilty, the transgressor would be put to death (executed or murdered) by the flock. The other explanation is based more upon the opportunistic natural survival instincts of crows. When huge swarms of crows would descend upon battlefields feeding upon the fallen and conjuring up a murderous scene, it led to the sinister term, "A Murder Of Crows."

A Parliament Of Owls

And where did this name for a gathering of owls come from? It is widely accepted that it came to us via C. S. Lewis' children's classic, The Chronicles of Narnia, (that later became a movie). The Parliament of Owls was an organization of talking wise owls that met at night to tend to the affairs of the land of Narnia.

A Host Of Sparrows

Sparrows are one of the most common birds in the world, with 140 species recognized by The International Ornithological Committee (IOC), and are found on every continent except Antarctica. It is thought that a group of these very social, gregarious, friendly and noisy birds were called a Host of Sparrows because of their seemingly welcoming nature...like that of a host. A flock of sparrows is sometimes also called A Chattering or A Quarrel because of their constant chirping.

A Convocation Of Eagles

Eagles are generally solitary or found in lifelong mated pairs. It is unusual to see large gatherings of these majestic birds. Occasionally, when there is an abundant food source, limited nesting sites or necessary migration due to drastic weather conditions, groups of eagles will come together.

A convocation is a large gathering frequently referring to clergy. It is thought that the term, A Convocation of Eagles, arose when people witnessed a large gathering of solemn looking Bald Eagles with their white heads and necks contrasted against their dark bodies. It reminded them of clerical garb and so the expression was born. When flying, a group of eagles, with their wings spread wide soaring on the air currents, is called a Soar of Eagles.

A Raft Of Cormorants

Cormorants include more than 40 species, have been around for millions of years and can be found all over the world. Here in Florida, you will see them everywhere. They are carnivorous, feeding mostly on fish. Additionally, these great swimmers and divers are pragmatic and will go where they can most easily feed and feel safe. So, you will find them in both fresh and salt water locations.

A group of cormorants when swimming is called a Raft of Cormorants. If you watch them, you can easily see why this is so. A group of ten or more cormorants often swim very closely together in a coordinated fashion. Thus, creating the image of a floating raft. When flying in formation, cormorants are known as a Flight of Cormorants. And when fishing, feeding or drying their wings upon a bank or shoreline, they are referred to as, A Gulp Of Cormorants because of the distinctive gulping of their prey.

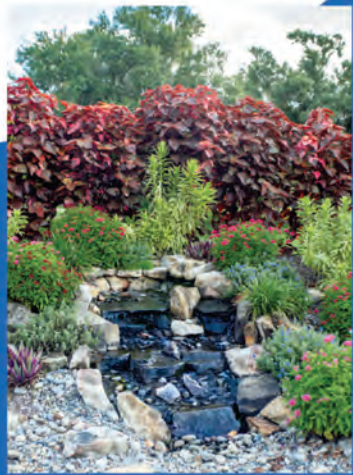
Join us next month for more fun facts about our fascinating feathered friends!



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