

VENERABLE VENERY

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If you thumb through your standard deskside dictionary, you may be shocked to learn that venery is a euphemistic term describing coital commerce.

To stem any blazing tide of flaming pens charging us with smut, sensationalism, prurience and suchlike, let us assure you that our topic concerns another -- wholly respectable -- interpretation of the word.

In times ago, venery -- as applied to hunting -- was commonly used to describe the sport of hunting, the art and thrill of the chase. Eventually, its meaning expanded to include the objects of this sport ... the beasts themselves. Finally, it came to describe the curious logological practice of assigning specific words to denote particular multitudes or aggregations of specific animals. Some familiar veneric expressions: a gaggle of geese, a pride of lions, a covey of quail. To be precise, "gaggle" refers only to geese while on the ground ... when in flight, they are a "skein".

In the two columns below, we've listed several animals, along with their veneric descriptions. How many can you pair up?

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| 1. a sleuth of | a. owls |
| 2. a murder of | b. foxes |
| 3. a skulk of | c. peacocks |
| 4. a leap of | d. fish |
| 5. a building (or clamor) of | e. goldfinches |
| 6. a fesnyng of | f. kangaroos |
| 7. a charm of | g. larks |
| 8. an exaltation of | h. plovers |
| 9. a congregation of | i. bears |
| 10. a troop of | j. crows |
| 11. a school of | k. rooks |
| 12. a parliament of | l. chickens |
| 13. a peep of | m. apes |
| 14. an ostentation of | n. leopards |
| 15. a shrewdness of | o. ferrets |

But why limit such imagination to beasts of prey? Why not extend our horizons to embrace all things ... people ... places ... activities ... inanimate objects ... the heavens themselves?

Attempts have been made along these lines, of course, resulting in such welcome additions to the language as a bunch of bananas ... a peal

of bells ... a horde of savages ... a bench of bishops or jurists ... a fleet, squadron or flotilla of ships ... a clutch of eggs ... a host of angels ... a rope of onions.

In a moment of whimsy, we compiled our own list of veneric morsels, which we are delighted to share with you ... again, if you can find the proper pairings:

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| 1. a rash of | a. oranges |
| 2. a mountain of | b. worms |
| 3. a gob of | c. electricians |
| 4. a culture of | d. numismatists |
| 5. a shock of | e. posts |
| 6. a pride of | f. poison ivy |
| 7. a collection of | g. uranium |
| 8. a slew of | h. pipe-cleaners |
| 9. a babble of | i. sailors |
| 10. a pile of | j. lifeboats |
| 11. a ream of | k. biologists |
| 12. a slug of | l. authorship |
| 13. a crush of | m. tongues |
| 14. a parcel of | n. Goliaths |
| 15. a raft of | o. Mohamets |

Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue. For readers who wish to pursue the topic of ventry further, read Willard Espy's "The Venereal Game" in the February 1975 Word Ways, in which he coins names for prostitutes, or James Lipton's excellent book An Exaltation of Larks (Penguin Books, 1977), reviewed in the November 1978 Word Ways.

KUDOS FOR WORD WAYS

The following quotation by Nancy Buckeye (Central Michigan University Library, Mount Pleasant, Michigan) appears in Bill Katz and Berry G. Richards' Magazines for Libraries (3rd edition, 1978):

This delightful publication deserves a great deal more attention than its circulation indicates. Articles promote word study as pure enjoyment although frequently they are the result of lengthy study. Any library serving clients 15 years of age and older should prominently display the title. Teachers will want to consult every issue for ideas to stimulate students' interest in language and thinking. Highly recommended.