

# ALPHABET SOUP:



## An Exaltation of Larks

By GYLES BRANDRETH

You probably know that a group of ants is called a colony and a collection of ponies is called a string. But did you know that a mass of larks is known as an exaltation?

There are collective nouns to describe all sorts of groups of animals. Here are some of the most unusual:

A shrewdness of apes  
A cete of badgers  
A shoal of bass  
A sloth of bears  
An army of caterpillars  
A clowder of cats  
A drove of cattle  
A peep of chickens  
A murder of crows  
A dule of doves  
A skulk of foxes  
A husk of hares  
A cast of hawks  
A brood of hens  
A siege of herons  
A harras of horses  
A smack of jellyfish  
A kindle of kittens  
A deceit of lapwings  
A leap of leopards  
A watch of nightingales  
A parliament of owls  
A covey of partridges  
An ostentation of peacocks  
An unkindness of ravens  
A crash of rhinoceroses  
A building of rooks  
A pod of seals  
A host of sparrows  
A dray of squirrels  
A murmuration of starlings  
A mustering of storks  
A flight of swallows  
A knot of toads



Clowder of Cats

A hover of trout  
A rafter of turkeys  
A pitying of turtledoves  
A bale of turtles  
A gam of whales  
A route of wolves  
A descent of woodpeckers

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As well as collecting collective nouns, I collect words containing hyphens. Words like "half-life" that use one hyphen are common enough. Words that need two hyphens — like "mother-in-law" — aren't unusual either. But finding words that require three hyphens or more isn't easy.

Here are the ones I've found so far, most of them the names of plants or flowers.

**3 hyphens:**  
snow-on-the-mountain: a spurge of the western United States that has showy flower

clusters and is used ornamentally

**4 hyphens:**  
gill-go-by-the-ground: a trailing Eurasian mint that is common as a weed in North America

**5 hyphens:**  
John-go-to-bed-at-noon: any of several plants whose flowers close about noon

kiss-me-over-the-garden-gate: any of various plants, especially prince's-feather

**7 hyphens:**  
Har-u-pu-ka-ka-sharu-sha-bau: the name of a mystical Egyptian deity

**8 hyphens:**  
Willy-with-the-wisp-and-peggy-with-the-lantern: a light that appears at night over marshy ground

**9 hyphens:**  
Kitty-come-down-the-lane-jump-up-and-kiss-me: the cuckoopint, a common European arum

meet-her-in-the-entry-kiss-her-in-the-buttery: another flower: a pansy

I have not come across a single word with 10 hyphens. If you happen to discover a not-four-five-six-seven-eight-or-nine-but-10-legged word listed in any legitimate dictionary, do let me know.