

Creating new words and terms for no good reason

Mark Twain said, “The difference between the right word and nearly the right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.”

Throughout the ages, writers, and others, have strived to come up with better words, or at least more colorful terms, perhaps to stave off boredom or in the interest of specificity. Sometimes, it’s just a game.

I can’t think of anything along these lines that is more curious than the terms used for groups of birds and animals. A gaggle of geese? A murder of crows? A romp of otters? A convocation of eagles, a flamboyance of flamingoes, a parliament of owls, a colony of penguins. A school of fish, a shiver of sharks, a float of crocodiles, a knot of snakes, a grumble of

maggots, a scourge of mosquitoes, a clew of worms.

Some of these terms date back to 15th-century England, where, according to Google, it was “a game of wit among the upper class meant to show off one’s cleverness and observational skills.”

I want in on that. I can be witty. I can also be witless. Ask my wife.

I started to look for groups of things that have no collective term. I can tell you, after wasting a day and a half, there aren’t many.

I started with animals. There are quite a few that roam alone, so they aren’t normally in groups. You don’t often see an avalanche of snow leopards, an armful of octopi, a shell of sea turtles, or a pool of axolotl.

Ramblin’ Man

By David Porter



I don’t even know what those are, but that didn’t stop me from assigning them a group name.

According to Google, there are several hundred names for groups of birds and animals, also called ventry. But the word “group” isn’t close to being the most substituted word in the English language. That title belongs to the word

reflect the nature of the grouping.

I came up with a few: a coward of quitters, a blunder of errors, a dunce of idiots, a parole of politicians. My selection was heavily influenced by reading the news that day.

Some words are way over-used and lack imagination, like “whatever,” “amazing,” “literally,” and even “like.” Like that can mean anything. So, in high school, a bleacher of pals tried to come up with a new word that could be used indeterminately. They came up with “bope!”

Whatever. Like, that’s not even a word, dude. It means nothing and yet can mean anything you want.

I’ve made up a few words over the years — none of which

I can remember and none that caught on. You might say I’ve created a monjumbletron of new words. Bope!

This is what I do when I don’t want to do the things I’m supposed to be doing. I call it research. When I do it a lot, it’s a wriggle of research. A wrangle of research? Why use words like “a body of,” “a plethora of” and “a collection of” when you can have so much more fun with it? I do a rigamarole of research. A slew, a ream, a bundle, a bunch, a scad, a wad, a load. Oodles and acres and gobs. It’s a lot.

I do the heavy lifting so you don’t have to. You’re welcome.

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In World War Two, Allied and Axis commanders alike became enamored with the notion that wars could be won by bombing the enemy into submission. One idea was that

the morale of the civilian populace could be broken, forcing the enemy to sue for peace. Another was that the enemy’s capacity to wage war would be destroyed. However, the Blitz

failed to break the morale of the British, and Allied bombing of Germany likewise failed. In addition, bombing failed to destroy the enemy’s capacity to wage war. My father served in Patton’s Third Army. He would shake his head over the number of times we bombed the ball bearing factory in Schweinfurt without success. The bombing campaign did “degrade” the enemy’s capacity to

wage war, but to win the war required boots on the ground and many, many casualties to take and hold territory.

It is true that the US military didn’t have to invade the home islands of Japan. But our bombing campaign, including “fire raids” that incinerated hundreds of thousands of people alive while burning large districts to the ground, and even atomic bombs that destroyed two cities outright in a single blow each, were not enough to force Japan to surrender. That required an additional threat. The Soviet Union declared war, and took the Kurile Islands. And the Japanese knew that Stalin didn’t care how many of his troops got killed. The twin threats of nuclear destruction and slaughter on the ground secured Japan’s unconditional surrender.

The Allies did have an invasion plan. As part of the plan, the US produced a stockpile of Purple Hearts, which are awarded to soldiers wounded in battle. That stockpile has been sufficient for all our subsequent military operations to this day.

In Vietnam, our intensive bombing did huge damage and killed staggering numbers of people, but failed to stop

enemy supplies from reaching the front or to break their resolve. Our troops in the field were able to win battles, but generally had to abandon the field within days. We didn’t win the war in Vietnam. (However, in the years that followed it may reasonably be argued that we did win the peace.)

Now we are engaged in an attempt to force the “unconditional surrender” of Iran by bombing them into submission. Or whatever it is that the Administration says the objectives now are. Since March, the president has told us over a dozen times that the Iranians want to make a deal. The most recent short-term deal failed to endure for anywhere near its allotted time. The Admin’s only answer seems to be, drop more bombs. We are in a role-reversed version of the story

of the tar baby. We decided to strike Iran without a clear objective or strategy, and now we are stuck fast.

The Admin has also tried push-button warfare against cocaine trafficking. Unmanned drones fire missiles that sink boats in the Caribbean. And there was a brief reduction in the flow of cocaine to the US when the strikes began. But now, the DEA field office in Miami, the “cocaine capital” of the US, reports that street cocaine is cheaper and more plentiful than it has been in over 20 years. But the “boat strikes” have been a smashing success in numbing Americans into accepting the use of military force to solve law-enforcement problems.

Don’t look for the moon

Don’t bother looking for the Moon early in the week as the Moon was “new” yesterday, sitting between the Earth and the Sun. But that means we’ll see it again in the western sky later in the week. Tomorrow evening, the Moon has risen from the Sun’s glare to sit just over a degree from the star Regulus in the western sky after sunset. The pair and below and right of the planet Venus. Friday evening, the Moon has gained altitude and pays the planet Venus a visit. The two aren’t as close as last month’s gathering, but it’s still an im-

In the night sky

By David Leake



pressive sight as they sit side-by-side. As the Moon moves higher in the sky, note how the position of Venus seems to shift further to the left each evening. If you own a telescope, see how Venus appears like a waxing gibbous Moon,

about 65% illuminated. It was Galileo and his small telescope who noticed the phases of Venus back in the early 1600’s. The changing phases showed that Venus orbited the Sun, something we take for granted today.

Fun Daze

Continued from page 1

East Main Street will run from 10:00 a.m. – 12:20 p.m. and the Lego Derby race will start at 12:30 p.m.

The downtown Sidney Car Show will take place from 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

The 50-year Village of Sidney Time Capsule will be opened up and items inside revealed at 11:00 a.m. in front of the Sidney American Legion Post 433 building located at 221 South David Street in downtown Sidney. Some of the folks that were

there when the time capsule was buried will be in attendance for the reveal so come on by and watch the excitement as items buried in the time capsule are revealed.

The bag tournament at the beer tent area starts at 11:30 a.m. and Bertrand’s petting zoo will be in the downtown area from 12:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Lexi Tieffel (former American Idol contestant) will perform at the beer tent from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m., car show awards will be given out in the downtown area at 2:00 p.m., Sidney Fun Daze parade line up is at 2:00 p.m.

at Witt Park, and the parade steps off at 3:00 p.m.

There’s an event taking place at the Sidney Community Library in downtown Sidney from 3:30 – 5:30 p.m. and inflatables for the kids will be at the Sidney Community Building parking lot located at 211 East Main Street from 3:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Hunter Lucas will perform at the beer tent from 5:00 – 8:00 p.m. followed by the Sidney Fun Daze grand finale of Owen Knap & The Rusty Strings performing at the beer tent from 8:30 – 11:30 p.m. Owen Knap is a

native of St. Joseph, Illinois.

The Friday, July 24 and Saturday, July 25 Sidney Fun Daze promises to be a great event with many activities going on that include something fun for everyone!

Call or text Donna Hooker at (217)-621-4929 or email her at mickey752004@yahoo.com or visit the Sidney Improvement Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064382331865> for more information about the Friday, July 24 and Saturday, July 25 Sidney Fun Daze.



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