

# A Crash of Rhinos!

## How this book came about

The idea for this book came up several years ago in discussion with Margaret Hamilton. She loves owls and the collective noun “a parliament of owls” was a starting point...

A Crash of Rhinos has a mix of traditional collective nouns and ones I made up especially for the book. Since publication this year it has been said (Magpies review, September 2010) that some reference to the traditional nouns used in the book would be good. So in response, here are the traditional collective nouns I used, for those people who have been wondering!

**A crash of rhinos**

**A sounder or swine**

**A fascination of boars**

**A string of ponies**

**A band of gorillas**

**A flamboyance of flamingos**

**A quarrel of sparrows**

**A float of crocodiles**

**A dabble of ducks**

**A murder of crows**

**A conspiracy of ravens**

**A parliament of owls**

The ones I made up came about through various experiences – research and observation of the animals (visiting zoos and farms, watching video clips on u-tube and wildlife documentaries were all inspirational) and equally important, the sound of the words , getting the right flow, rhythm or word play... often this meant that the collective noun started with the same sounding letter.

Here's a tricky one – **a charade of chameleons**. Neither of the words has the expected Ch sound as in chimney. Charade is a “sh” sound and chameleon is a hard “k” sound! Charade is also about chameleons being able to change their colour to blend into where they are – i.e. they can disguise themselves!

Here are the other ones that rely on how the particular animals behave:

**A wallow of warthogs** - a swine thing to do to cool off the skin... Having a wallow or wallowing is a way of submerging your body in mud or similar stuff;

**A hover of hummingbirds** – like insects, these tiny birds can beat their wings at some incredible amount per second (hover) so can stay in one spot in mid air while they find flowers to suck nectar through their long beaks.

**A lounge of lizards** – reptiles are cold blooded and to obtain energy and warmth from heat they lie around in the sun

**A pronk of springboks** - at first this was going to be a bounce of springboks. But when I looked further into how these animals behave I found that they do these crazy vertical jumps into the air! This action is called a pronk – or pronking. Sometimes they look like they are standing in mid air with straight legs!

**A string of ponies** – in the wild, ponies (I've based these on Exmoor and New Forest ponies from the British Isles) can be seen following the herd leader in single file as they pick their way along narrow paths on the moors or through the forests.

**A cacophony of cockatoos.** A cockatoo is defined basically as a parrot with a crest on its head. The birds along the top left branch in my illustration are all particular cockatoos. Plus the galahs at right.

They can all make loud noises – often screeching calls and when lots of them are in flocks it can be quite noisy...hence the word cacophony which also picks up the harsh sound of cockatoo as well.

**A galaxy of galahs** – these small cockatoos are seen in pairs or flying in small flocks. I sort of imagined looking up into the deep blue sky, being underneath a flock of these birds with their bright rose bodies dotting the sky.

**A blur of budgies** – in areas of the Australian desert budgies are seen flying together in huge flocks. They fly so fast, dipping and turning in unison, it's hard to see the individuals – more like a green blur! The odd blue mutant can occasionally be seen....

**A cast of cassowaries** – following on from the previous page with gorillas on stage, the 'theatrical theme' is continued with the word 'cast' and the three cassowaries lined up together, kicking their legs out. Actually this is what these great birds can do – kick to attack enemies or defend themselves. They can be quite dangerous and can inflict severe injury with their sharp claws. I've shown two different sub-species: one from New Guinea on the right and the other two from North East Australia. A chimpanzee, having left the gorilla concert, is also in on the act...he's dressed up like a cassowary while a rogue budgie grips his shoulder.

**A flamboyance of flamingos** – the inspiration for this illustration came from watching a bird documentary by David Attenborough. It showed the lesser flamingos of Africa (Lake Natron) doing their courtship dance en mass – all pink feathers, snaky necks and

vermilion chopstick legs ...moving in a choreographed group through the turquoise coloured water (algae) of the volcanic lake. An amazing spectacle!

**A quarrel of sparrows** – have you ever noticed how groups of sparrows get very noisy and aggressive...usually in mating season?

**A boogie of booby birds** – I love the craziness of these birds and their funny name and bizarre feet! I watched countless amateur videos on u-tube of blue footed booby birds doing courtship dances on the Galapagos Islands. Hence the reference to the dance – boogie – in the collective noun. Couldn't resist putting a red footed booby bird in there, too!

**A huddle of lemurs** – I've intentionally put three different subspecies of lemur along the branch (ring-tailed, masked and a Sifaka) as they are such beautiful creatures. Lemurs are very social and huddle together in groups.

**A shriek of shrikes**- four different subspecies are shown, all shrieking having spotted the crocodile sliding over onto the next page...

Looking through the water to **a float of crocodiles**, this illustration melds three different water environments. A mix of crayon, collage, ink and photo, the heavy bloat of hippos anchors the page while the crocs float and the wobbly sharks wobble through the water along the top. A nervous duck has waddled onto the wrong page....

Being able to play with the text positions was also a fun part of designing/making this book – an s is mistaken for a worm by a Muscovy duck...while the Peking ducks dabble in the puddle. Along the top a riot of roosters challenge each other – skinny fighting ones and bolder brash ones. Below an anxious **rash of guinea fowl**. These were inspired by a friend's guinea fowls which are very funny birds to watch. They are covered in spotted

feathers which reminded me of breaking out in a rash, while they exude this anxiety as they race along together, ever watchful for predators.

Other things that helped me make up some collective nouns were more a response to animal groups from a human point of view.

When you see penguins all standing together as large groups they look like they are gathered having a great meeting or party. I took this a bit further and have them dancing together through the water...with a totally imaginary fairy penguin with wings on a skateboard...just for fun. ***A platter of platypuses*** just seemed to arrive somehow... Seals are sliding – they are so slippery.

***A crash of rhinos*** – this for me refers to the weight and sheer strength shown by rhinos when they run at speed, and also how their feet crash on the ground when moving fast. My illustration shows a group of three different subspecies, just before they land! From left, white rhino, (or wide lipped rhino) with calf, black rhino, Indian rhino.)

***An endpaper of elephants*** and ***a frontispiece of frogs*** I thank Margaret for! They are African elephants and my own fantasy of frogs!

I wanted the book to start with a big bang, hence the cannon. I found the right cannon on the edge of Lake Wendouree in Ballarat, took a photo then adapted it to my illustration. The inspiration for a projection of piglets came from the performing troupe at the Melbourne Show. Then I had the idea to have them being blasted over the next couple of pages ending up in the mud (also from Lake Wendouree which at the time was almost dry). A perfect place for wallowing! The mud and the grasses I also photographed at the lake's edge.

For anyone who gets it, I made little fascinator hats for the boars.

**A bother of blowflies** is a human or animal reaction/response to these insects. When I was drawing blowflies a big, fat, shiny green one flew in the window...was I bothered? A ballet of butterflies is also a human response, in this case to the lightness and delicate quality of a butterfly, reminiscent of a dancer in the air.

**A bonanza of bugs** is a lizard response to these creatures as lizards eat insects so lots of them is a bonanza feast!

In contrast, **a misery of mosquitoes** is a human/animal response to the insect – the misery they cause when animals and humans get bitten (in this case a poor springbok).

**A palette of lorikeets** is inspired by the bright colours of lorikeets like paint on an artist's palette. The “ts” and “k” sounds also go well. Only the parrots actually sitting on the palette are lorikeets. The ones below are other particular types of parrots – rosella, gang gang, princess, eclectic.

**A pandemonium of parrots** – the noise, colour, motion, and chaos created by lots of parrots together!

**A band of gorillas** was one of the first collective nouns chosen for the book. I was inspired by an advertisement with a drumming gorilla a few years ago advertising a well known brand of chocolate. I wanted to show the gorillas as a rock band with some type of audience shown. For ages this was going to be an audience of aliens. But this just never seemed to sit with the rest of the book and animals. As a result, I put off doing this illustration until the end. The inspiration came from my son who had been to the Big Day Out concert. His description of being in a moshpit made me think of a whole lot of monkeys...perfect for a band of gorillas!

***A waddle of wombats*** refers to the way wombats walk.... I've shown the hairy nose wombat and the common wombat. ***A dribble of dibblers*** just seemed right – a small group stopping and starting making their way over to this page.

***A cuddle of koalas*** – their soft fur and sleepy countenance make them irresistibly cuddly – just watch the claws! ***A cushion of echidnas*** was a sort of pincushion idea - I was reminded of an old pincushion in the shape of a hedgehog. It's also a play on words – the sharp c sounds go together while the thought of a soft cushion is actually the opposite of what this mound of echidnas would feel like to sit on! Hence the koala's toe and expression...

I have used mixed media for the illustrations, combining crayon, paper collage, ink, wash, my own photos, lino cuts and fabric.

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