

What is the Collective Noun for a Group of Librarians?

by Kerrie Stevens

Harvest Bible College Librarian

At a recent theological librarian's conference (ANZTLA 2012), this question was raised informally on a number of occasions, and without a clearly definitive outcome. I have taken it upon myself to see what possibilities could be used for the description of a group of librarians. In the process, I have discovered that we are not the only group of librarians to ponder the thought of what we should call ourselves ...

But first, what exactly is a collective noun? Nouns are people, places, and things. A special class of noun is the collective noun, naming groups composed of members.¹ A collective noun is the name of a number of people or things taken together, described as a single group despite being composed of more than one person or thing. Grammatical rules describing the correct use of singular or plural verbs with collective nouns vary.

Some collective nouns descriptively label the people or things they are identifying, for example, a *pride* of lions. The *Word Ancestry Journal* describes the origin of the use of the word *pride* for a group of lions as coming "from the felines' place at the top of the jungle food chain...As the nobility of the wild, lions were anthropomorphically given the same pride that human royalty carried due to their place in the social food chain."² Hence, in this and many other cases, the collective noun is often descriptive of the type of people, places or things it is identifying.

There has been a limited amount of discussion officially published on this particular topic. In what would seem to be an authoritative resource for collective nouns, the *Dictionary of Collective Nouns and Group Terms*, Sparkes lists not one, but two options for the collective noun for librarians; a *sheaf* of librarians, or a *catalogue* of librarians.³ In another published



1 Robin L. Simmons, "The Collective Noun Grammar Bytes," (1997-2012), accessed July 17, 2012, <http://www.chompchomp.com/terms/collectivenoun.htm>.

2 gwoman, "Historical Origins of English Words and Phrases – a Pride of Lions," *Word Ancestry Journal* (2008), <http://word-ancestry.livejournal.com/58413.html>.

3 Ivan Sparkes, *Dictionary of Collective Nouns and Group Terms* (London: White Lion Publishers, 1975), 149.



“Several Google searches produced a myriad of possibilities. A number of bloggers have posed this question to their followers many times previously, often with numerous and humorous results.”

resource, Lipton says they should be known as a *sbush* of librarians.⁴ Sparse as it is, these are about the limit of published resources that could be located. Online searching was the next step.

Several Google searches produced a myriad of possibilities. A number of bloggers have posed this question to their followers many times previously, often with numerous and humorous results. Michael Kelley submitted a collation of suggestions from a discussion thread on the Publib Listserv on this very topic.⁵ The suggestions are listed below:

- A *collection* of librarians
- A *hush* of librarians
- A *2.0* of librarians
- A *source* of librarians
- A *Derwey* of librarians
- A *gaggle* of librarians
- A *covey* of librarians
- A *bevy* of librarians
- A *MARC* of librarians
- A *query* of librarians
- A *chapter* of librarians
- A *shelf* of librarians
- A *niche* of librarians
- A *league* of librarians
- A *pride* of librarians
- A *renewal* of librarians
- An *OPAC* of librarians
- A *Google* of librarians
- A *reference* of librarians
- A *force* of librarians
- A *genre* of librarians
- A *riot* of librarians
- A *compendium* of librarians
- An *index* of librarians
- A *catalogue* of librarians
- A *stack* of librarians
- A *revelation* of librarians
- A *posse* of librarians
- A *class* of librarians
- A *volume* of librarians

4 James Lipton, *An Exaltation of Larks: The Ultimate Edition* (New York: Viking, 1991), 182.

5 Michael Kelley, “In Search of a Good Collective Noun for Librarians,” *Library Journal* (2001), accessed July 17, 2012, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6727991>.

“The Warrior Librarian Weekly has another compilation of possible collective nouns relevant to specific librarians and related occupations”

Other bloggers have had similar ideas too:

- A *bookish* of librarians
- An *alphabetisation* of librarians
- A *lush* of librarians
- A *quiet* of librarians
- A *litany* of librarians
- A *sbush* of librarians.⁶

Wiki Answers tries to claim definitively that the answer to the question is a *stack* of librarians but there is no discussion or explanation of how this came to be.⁷ As a collaborative group, it sounds plausible but has limited authority for application.

The *Warrior Librarian Weekly* has another compilation of possible collective nouns relevant to specific librarians and related occupations:⁸

- An *album* of graphics librarians
- An *annoyance* of book sellers
- An *answer* of reference librarians
- An *account* of information brokers
- A *bureaucracy* of government document librarians
- A *book* of library pages
- A *brace* of dental librarians
- A *circuit* of operations librarians
- A *cobweb* of archivists
- A *constitution* of congressional librarians
- A *drawer* of cataloguers
- An *echo* of distance librarians
- An *exchange* of interlibrary loan librarians
- A *faith* of church librarians
- A *headline* of media librarians
- A *help* of assistant librarians
- A *humor* of librarians
- An *incarceration* of prison library trustees
- An *indemnity* of insurance librarians
- An *intimidation* of library assessors
- An *intrigue* of corporate librarians
- A *liferaft* of outreach librarians
- A *litigation* of law librarians

6 JD., “Collective Nouns: Subs and Designer,” *The Engine Room* (2008), accessed July 17, 2012, <http://engineroomblog.blogspot.com.au/2008/01/collective-nouns-subs-and-designers.html>; and Bob Morris, “Librarians by the Roomful!,” *Surrounded on Three Sides* (2006), accessed July 17, 2012, <http://surroundedonthreesides.blogspot.com.au/2006/12/librarians-by-roomful.html>.

7 “Wiki Answers/Q/ *What is the collective noun for group of librarians*,” <http://wiki.answers.com>” accessed July 17, 2012.

8 Amanda B. Credaro, “Collective Nouns for Librarians,” *Warrior Librarian Weekly* (2002), accessed July 17, 2012, <http://www.warriorlibrarian.com/LOL/admin.html>.



“This posting takes it one step further to describe the various stages of librarians throughout a three day conference, calling it the ‘Conference Mutation Process’”

- A *prescription* of medical librarians
- A *prospectus* of library publicists
- A *purchase* of acquisitions librarians
- A *report* of library consultants
- A *school* of library media specialists
- A *server* of library webmasters
- A *service* of public librarians
- A *succession* of serial librarians
- A *Seuss* of children’s librarians
- A *summit* of library administrators
- A *symphony* of music librarians.

This posting takes it one step further to describe the various stages of librarians throughout a three day conference, calling it the ‘Conference Mutation Process’⁹. A very clever idea in my opinion, and scarily accurate.

Day 1

Arrival	An <i>excitement</i> of librarians
Registration	An <i>anticipation</i> of librarians
Keynote Address	A <i>reflection</i> of librarians
First Workshop	A <i>development</i> of librarians
Morning Tea	A <i>chatter</i> of librarians
Trade Display	A <i>frenzy</i> of librarians
Keynote 2	A <i>consideration</i> of librarians
Workshop 2	A <i>renewal</i> of librarians
Lunch	A <i>linkage</i> of librarians
Workshop 3	An <i>animation</i> of librarians
Optional Tour	An <i>amusement</i> of librarians
Formal Dinner	A <i>glamour</i> of librarians

Day 2

Breakfast	A <i>hum</i> of librarians
Keynote 3	An <i>attention</i> of librarians
Workshop 4	A <i>tenuousity</i> of librarians
Morning Tea	A <i>munch</i> of librarians
Trade Display	A <i>browse</i> of librarians
Keynote 4	A <i>politeness</i> of librarians
Workshop 5	An <i>opportunity</i> of librarians
Lunch	A <i>bloat</i> of librarians
Keynote 5	An <i>auditorium</i> of librarians
Workshop 6	An <i>arrangement</i> of librarians
Informal Dinner	A <i>Bacchanalia</i> of librarians

9 Amanda B. Credaro, “Collective Nouns for Librarians Part 2: The Conference Mutation Process,” *Warrior Librarian Weekly* (2002), accessed July 17, 2012, <http://www.warriorlibrarian.com/ROFL/nouns2.html>.



“There appears to be an unlimited list of possible terms to describe a group of librarians. It seems to be up to the particular group at the time as to what they’ll call themselves.”

Day 3

Breakfast	A <i>crapulence</i> of librarians
Keynote 6	A <i>silence</i> of librarians
Workshop 7	A <i>biliousness</i> of librarians
Morning Tea	A <i>queaze</i> of librarians
Trade Display	A <i>meander</i> of librarians
Keynote 7	A <i>presence</i> of librarians
Workshop 8	An <i>endurance</i> of librarians
Plenary/Evaluation	A <i>tenacity</i> of librarians
AGM	A <i>residue</i> of librarians
Optional Lunch	An <i>absence</i> of librarians

This very cleverly and accurately describes the many stages that librarians go through when attending conferences. However, as clever an aside as this is, it still doesn’t help answer the question of what do we call a group of librarians?

There appears to be an unlimited list of possible terms to describe a group of librarians. It seems to be up to the particular group at the time as to what they’ll call themselves.

Day Al-Mohamed lists a few more options not already considered above:¹⁰

- A *simmelband* of librarians
- A *collation* of librarians
- A *classification* of librarians

Librarian Avengers’ Erica Firment asked her library readers to submit suggestions, and received numerous ideas already mentioned above, but a few unique ones too:¹¹

- A *school* of librarians
- A *swarm* of librarians
- A *coven* of librarians
- An *exaltation* of librarians
- A *rabble* of librarians
- A *band* of librarians
- A *library* of librarians
- An *anthology* of librarians
- A *file* of librarians
- A *gang* of librarians
- A *shock* of librarians
- A *web* of librarians
- A *net* of librarians
- A *database* of librarians
- A *facet* of librarians
- A *binding* of librarians

10 Al-Mohamed Day, “Collective Nouns and Groups of...Stuff (i.e. What do you Call a Group of Writers?),” *Unleaded – Fuel for Writing* (2011), accessed July 18, 2012, <http://unleadedwriting.com/tag/collective-nouns>.

11 Erica Olsen Firment, “A Stack of Librarians,” *Librarian Avengers* (2006), accessed July 17, 2012, <http://librarianavengers.org/2006/03/a-s-tck-of-librarians>.



“Many collective noun suggestions actually describe an aspect of our library work, or the stereotypical shushing librarian with glasses, twinset, pearls and a bun in her hair.”

- A *murder* of librarians
- An *idle* of librarians

Our colleagues in New Zealand have also been pondering this conundrum for some time. The School Library Association of New Zealand collected suggestions posted to their listserv during October 2009. Suggestions not already mentioned above include:¹²

- A *literati* of librarians
- A *silence* of librarians
- A *luxury* of librarians
- A *murmuration* of librarians
- An *acquisition* of librarians
- A *liberation* of librarians
- A *literature* of librarians
- An *accession* of librarians
- A *circulation* of librarians
- A *listserv* of librarians
- An *omnipotence* of librarians
- An *omniscience* of librarians
- A *lettraset* of librarians
- A *literacy society* of librarians

Yet another blogger, Jeremy Dibbell, posed the question on his blog PhiloBiblos.¹³ Some suggestions not already listed above, include:

- A *gathering* of librarians
- A *fascicle* of librarians
- A *bibliogeekerie* of librarians
- A *spectacle* of librarians
- A *cutter* of librarians
- A *press* of rare book librarians
- A *subscription* of serials librarians
- A *search* of reference librarians
- A *folio* of librarians
- A *duodecimo* of librarians
- A *gauffering* of librarians
- An *errata* of librarians
- A *backlog* of librarians
- A *clog* of librarians
- A *codex* of librarians
- A *tome* of librarians
- A *trove* of librarians
- A *shh* of librarians

12 School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa – Te Puna Whare Matauranga a Kura, *Collective Nouns for Librarians* (2009), accessed July 17, 2012, <http://slanzawiki.wetpaint.com/page/Collective+Nouns+for+Librarians>.

13 Jeremy Dibbell, “What do you Call a Group of Librarians?,” *PhiloBiblos* (2008), accessed July 19, 2012, <http://philobiblos.blogspot.com.au/2008/02/what-do-you-call-group-of-librarians.html>.

“So, what do we call ourselves? I guess that is still up for discussion, but basically, I say you can call yourselves whatever you like!”

Many collective noun suggestions actually describe an aspect of our library work, or the stereotypical shushing librarian with glasses, twinset, pearls and a bun in her hair. Is that fair? A number of newer, more technical terms have been suggested and are more relevant to the type of work many of us now do every day using many online resources.

Now that’s a long list of possibilities from simple Google searching, but what about something a little more ‘official’? Searches in a number of encyclopaedic, dictionary, humanities and social sciences and literature online databases resulted in no suggestions at all for the collective noun for a group of librarians. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* was no help.¹⁴ The State Library of Victoria was even consulted in the attempt to get an official ruling on the correct term, but even they couldn’t find anything.

So, what do we call ourselves? I guess that is still up for discussion, but basically, I say you can call yourselves whatever you like!

Although there is no official, accepted, definitive, authoritative term to be used, it would seem appropriate to use whatever term is relevant at the time for the specific group of librarians being grouped. My personal preference is a *collection* of librarians as it describes what we do (ie: collecting information), how we do it (ie: maintaining collections of items/sources etc) and what we do with them (ie: collecting and sorting into groups, like with like).

So, from one librarian to a whole *collection* of librarians...enjoy!

A complete alphabetical listing of all suggested terms uncovered in my searchings is provided as supplementary materials to this article.

Read Kerrie’s extensive list by downloading the supplementary file (on the right-hand-side under Reading Tools).

Bibliography

Credaro, Amanda B. “Collective Nouns for Librarians.” *Warrior Librarian Weekly*. 2002. Accessed July 17, 2012. <http://www.warriorlibrarian.com/LOL/admin.html>.

Credaro, Amanda B. “Collective Nouns for Librarians Part 2: The Conference Mutation Process.” *Warrior Librarian Weekly*. 2002. Accessed July 17, 2012. <http://www.warriorlibrarian.com/ROFL/nouns2.html>.

Day, Al-Mohamed, “Collective Nouns and Groups of...Stuff (i.e. What do you Call a Group of Writers?).” *Unleaded – Fuel for Writing*. 2011. Accessed July 18, 2012. <http://unleadedwriting.com/tag/collective-nouns>.

¹⁴ “librarian noun,” *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Angus Stevenson. (Oxford University Press, 2010), Oxford Reference Online, accessed August 1, 2012 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e0468920>.

- Dibbell, Jeremy. "What do you Call a Group of Librarians?" *PhiloBiblos*. 2008. Accessed July 19, 2012. <http://philobiblos.blogspot.com.au/2008/02/what-do-you-call-group-of-librarians.html>.
- gwoman. "Historical Origins of English Words and Phrases – a Pride of Lions." *Word Ancestry Journal*. 2008. Accessed July 19, 2012. <http://word-ancestry.livejournal.com/58413.html>.
- Firment, Erica Olsen. "A Stack of Librarians." *Librarian Avengers*. 2006. Accessed July 17, 2012. <http://librarianavengers.org/2006/03/a-s-tck-of-librarians>.
- JD. Collective Nouns: Subs and Designer. *The Engine Room*. 2008. Accessed July 17, 2012. <http://engineroomblog.blogspot.com.au/2008/01/collective-nouns-subs-and-designers.html>.
- Kelley, Michael. "In Search of a Good Collective Noun for Librarians." *Library Journal*. 2001. Accessed July 17, 2012. <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6727991>.
- Lipton, James. *An Exaltation of Larks: The Ultimate Edition*. New York: Viking, 1991.
- Morris, Bob. "Librarians by the Roomful!," *Surrounded on Three Sides*. 2006. Accessed July 17, 2012. <http://surroundedonthreesides.blogspot.com.au/2006/12/librarians-by-roomful.html>.
- School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa – Te Puna Whare Matauranga a Kura. "Collective Nouns for Librarians." 2009. Accessed July 17, 2012. <http://slanzawiki.wetpaint.com/page/Collective+Nouns+for+Librarians>.
- Sparkes, Ivan. *Dictionary of Collective Nouns and Group Terms*. London: White Lion Publishers, 1975.
- Stevenson, Angus, ed. "librarian noun." In *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford University Press, 2010. *Oxford Reference Online*. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e0468920>.