

TRIPLE TAUTONYMS IN BIOLOGY

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Triple tautonyms are hard to find. I know of only two in Webster's Third Edition, *cha-cha-cha* and *tat-tat-tat*. On page 175 in his book Language on Vacation (Scribner's, 1965), Dmitri Borgmann also suggests the college sororities *Delta Delta Delta* and *Sigma Sigma Sigma*, the honor society *Beta Beta Beta*, and the scientific names for the African weaverbird and the common rat, *Quelea quelea quelea* and *Rattus rattus rattus* (misspelled with a single T). There are a few legitimate additions to his list, such as the movie title *Tora! Tora! Tora!*; much less acceptable are juxtapositions of the *Row, Row, Row your boat ... variety*.

The best hope for more triple tautonyms lies in discovering taxonomic terms from a variety of sources. In the sixteenth century, Linnaeus devised the very successful genus-species binomial system for plants and animals. In all branches of botany and zoology, as the years passed, more information accumulated about varieties or subspecies, and the naming was best accomplished by adding extra Latin words - producing trinomials and even tetranomials. An example: *Alchemilla* is a genus name, roughly classed in Webster's Third as flowers called lady's-mantle. *Alchemilla vulgaris* was named by Linnaeus, and is discussed in Britton and Brown's An Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States and Canada, where it is known by the common names of duck's-foot, lion's-foot and bear's-foot, among others. But with more intensive investigation into minor differences, binomials do not suffice. A very detailed Icelandic flower guide, A. Löve's Íslenzk Ferdaflóra (1970), describes differences among several subspecies, and varieties of these, so that we find an illustration of *Alchemilla vulgaris filicaulis filicaulis*. There seems little doubt that careful search in specialized biology books and current literature will yield many hundreds of binomial tautonyms, as well as many trinomials. Here is a list of fourteen I have found to add to the two cited by Borgmann.

- Bufo bufo bufo*, the European toad (1)
- Naja naja naja*, the black cobra (1)
- Alces alces alces*, the Scandinavian elk (2)
- Bison bison bison*, the Great Plains bison. (3)
- Buteo buteo buteo*, the common buzzard (4)
- Gallus gallus gallus*, the Cochín-Chinese red junglefowl (5)
- Caretta caretta caretta*, the Atlantic loggerhead turtle (6)
- Gorilla gorilla gorilla*, the coastal gorilla (7)
- Lagopus lagopus lagopus*, the willow ptarmigan (4)

Redunca redunca redunca, the Bohor reedbuck (2)
 Panthera panthera panthera, the Barbary leopard (7)
 Capreolus capreolus capreolus, the European roe buck (7)
 Francolinus francolinus francolinus, the black francolin (4)
 Crossoptilon crossoptilon crossoptilon, the Szechuan white-eared
 pheasant (5)

1. W. Bucherl and E. Buckley, Venomous Animals and their Venoms (1971), 3 volumes
2. U. Mochi and T.D. Carter, Hoofed Mammals of the World (1971)
3. D. Day, The Doomsday Book of Animals (1981)
4. Index Medicus (names found in titles of articles)
5. P. Wayre, A Guide to the Pheasants of the World (1969)
6. C.H. Ernst and R.W. Barbour, Turtles of the United States (1972)
7. Salvadori and Florio, Rare and Beautiful Animals (1978)

A FEAST FOR LIMERICK LOVERS

In the last two years, two societies devoted to the care and feeding of the limerick have appeared: The Limerick League (J. Beauregard Pepys, 1212 Ellsworth St., Philadelphia PA 19147), which issues a quarterly newsletter in Verbatim format for \$15 per year, and Limerick SIG (Arthur Deex, Box 365, Moffett CA 94035), which issues a monthly newsletter for \$15 per year (\$12 to Mensa members).

The limerick is often bawdy, and people who blush at four-letter words should pass up the chance to subscribe to either journal. Yet, in the hands of a master like A. N. Wilkins, it can transcend its raffish reputation: "When I travel to Boston," Ms. Whipple | remarked, "my enjoyment is triple/ if I can get scrod." | "Yes," her friend said, "It's odd, | though, your using the past participle." The limerick is a comic art form which ideally builds to an explosive surprise in the final line. Pepys argues that the English language is uniquely qualified to support limerick-writing because of its "massive vocabulary" enabling one to select the mot juste, and its dual Anglo-Saxon ("hard") and Latin ("soft") heritage, leading to startling verbal contrasts.

Judging from the book reviews in Pepys' Letters from Limerick, nearly everybody, from Isaac Asimov and John Ciardi to college deans and retired newspaper correspondents, has been writing and publishing his own limerick collection. (The most spectacular is Rhyme or Reason, a history of philosophy in limerick form.) So, there seems little chance that Pepys or Deex will run out of material soon. Pepys argues that the limerick is uniquely challenging because of the necessity to compress the story into a very short space, requiring the utmost in ingenuity and skill. Long live limericks!