

X-X WORD UPDATE

JEFF GRANT

Hastings, New Zealand

The letter X has always fascinated people. It represents the unknown, the indefinable, the mysterious. An X may be used to designate a kiss, a ten-dollar bill, a type of chromosome, and a strength of ale, as well as a person's signature, a mistake, hybridity, and a movie rating. The X-Lexicon is an unpublished collection of approximately three thousand terms beginning with X (there are 486 solid-form X-words in the Air Force list of Webster's Second Edition). To further illustrate its comprehensiveness, the X-Lexicon contains 376 terms starting xanth-, from Xanthaea to xanthylum.

Entries have in the main been culled from various English dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases and biographies. Excluded are foreign words, abbreviations and symbols, nonce-words, telephone directory surnames, company and trade names, unless also found in another reference.

In the course of compilation I came across a number of improvements and additions to Darryl Francis's May 1974 article and subsequent Colloquy ites on words beginning and ending with X. Firstly, here are a couple of interesting triple-X nonce-words that didn't make it into the collection:

XEROXPOX skin disease of copier paper, characterized by large black powdery blotches (More Sniglets, Rich Hall & Friends, 1985)
 XIXAX a mythical place mentioned in the song 'Born in Xixax' on the 1982 album 'Nunsexmonkrock' by Nina Hagen

The following terms have updated sources:

XEROX to photocopy; uncapitalized in the Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, 1989
 XYLOTOX a stable, nonirritating, nontoxic local anaesthetic (Black's Veterinary Dictionary, 1987)

Finally, here are some new X-terminating words from the X-Lexicon:

XANAX a brand of alprazolam, used in the treatment of certain anxiety states (Random House Dictionary, 2nd Edition, Unabridged, 1987)

XANTHONYX old name for a genus of Mexican land snails (The Encyclopaedic Dictionary, 1886-90)

XENOCHARAX a genus of characinoid fish of tropical Africa, possibly an obsolete name (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 10th Edition, 1893)

XENOGLAUX a genus of long-whiskered owlets of N. Peru (A Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World, Richard Howard, Revised Ed., 1984)

XENOTHRIX a genus of extinct New World monkeys from the Quaternary period of Jamaica (Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia, Vol 10, 1973)

THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY ON COMPACT DISK

The twenty volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition (OED2) are now available on CD-ROM (a "metallic beermat", quips Anthony Burgess) for \$895, approximately one-third the cost of the printed version. For this price, one gets not only the full text, but an extremely powerful and versatile electronic tool for searching for all words in the dictionary with specified properties: for example, all palindromes, or words containing Q not followed by U; all words of Urdu origin; all citations from a certain author or in a certain range of years - even all words with definitions containing the word "baseball". (Elsewhere in this issue, the editor presents the results of the OED2 CD-ROM answer to a venerable logological question: what words end in **-gry**?) Although the casual browser may be daunted by the price (necessarily augmented by the need for a CD drive costing a few hundred dollars, plus Windows and Microsoft CD-ROM software), the serious logologist owning an IBM-compatible PC with hard disk should certainly give it consideration. It gives quick access to lexical information that is impossible to contemplate assembling by hand.

This looks like the start of a new age of rapid and versatile information retrieval; one eagerly awaits the time when CD-ROM technology will be applied to other reference works (the Merriam-Webster dictionaries, the Encyclopedia Britannica, The Times Index-Gazetteer). The reader is referred to the May 1991 **Word Ways** review of a CD-ROM containing the names of 90 million US telephone owners, or the February 1992 issue containing a review of the Omni Gazetteer.