Dmitri Borgmann, in "Vowel Patterns" in his book Language on Vacation (Scribner’s, 1965), muses on the finding of what would be the 'ultimate triumph', a 5-letter word constructed from one each of the five vowels A, E, I, O and U. If you turn to page 638 of The Encyclopedia of Paleontology (Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, 1979), edited by Rhodes W. Fairbridge and David Jablonski, you will find IOUEA, the name of a Cretaceous fossil sponge genus! This discovery came about whilst I was searching for AEIOU animal words for a future Word Ways article. My first reaction was a silent 'Eureka' (being in the library at the time), swiftly followed by the fear that it might be a spelling misprint (already having met a few of those!). But no, all is well – it is also in Nomenclatur Zoologicus (Zoological Society of London, 1966), edited by Marcia A. Edwards and A. Tindell Hopwood, on page 133 of Volume VI (1946-55).

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How are we to pronounce this gem, bearing in mind that the -EA ending of zoological names is normally pronounced as in EAR without the R, rather than E-A as in the alphabet? Investigating Webster’s Third, it appears that, when a word begins 10-, invariably the 1 and 0 are included in the same syllable. On this evidence, we are left with a choice of 2- and 3-syllable words (such as IO-UEA, 10U-EA, or 10-U-EA). I would opt for IO-UEA, but perhaps only Dr. de Laubenfels will ever know. Appropriately, IO in Latin means ‘hurrah’, ‘oh’ or ‘ah’!

The 5-vowel arrangement IOUEA appears as part of two all-vowel words. In "Vowel Concentrations" in Language on Vacation, Dmitri Borgmann mentions AIOUEA, a genus of plants of the laurel family, and OIOUEAE, a trope of the Gregorian Lesser Doxology, consisting of the vowels in 'World Without End, Amen'. A suitable finishing point!

**IOUEA: A CRETACEOUS COUP**

SUSAN THORPE
Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, England

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