

A WORD-WATCHER'S ABECEDARY

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We folk etymologists have a cardinal rule: never look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary! One can invariably guess their meaning by context and syllabic division alone. Besides, only by this method could anyone intuit the nature of eponymous creatures such as the following:

- ACU a primitive but intelligent hominid (acu men have a reputation for insight)
- AWK a highly-intelligent cousin of the goat, capable of making arrangements for the care and feeding of its orphaned offspring (the typical awk ward being too clumsy to take care of itself)
- BAUCH a catlike creature which inspires its owner to emulate its exceptional cleanliness and sense of responsibility (debauched owners - those who lose their pets - undergo a precipitous decline)
- BUSIN a pet which enjoys being touched and poked by people's noses (nuzzle a person's male busin as you will, but don't ever poke your nose in their business)
- CANTANKER a wild pony of the steppes which is untamable (because of its cantankerous nature), a cousin of the boister and rambunct
- CHAO according to the Tao, the chao is a cat native to Laos, Macao and Sao Paolo (male chaos exhibit disorderly courtship rituals, and the offspring of chaos is an archy)
- CIV a cousin of the civet which live in highly-organized communities (the theory of their hierarchical structure being known as civics)
- CUMBER a graceless, elephantine creature (of cumbersome bearing)
- DEM a solitary animal of many different colors (but the tan dem is always found in pairs)
- EAVE a sedentary, somnolent breed of Chinese cats which sat on the lap of the Emperor's eunuchs for days at a time (standing to overhear others' conversations, they were sometimes called eaves droppers)
- ECKL a graceful rodent that leaves distinctive tracks almost resembling intelligent writing as it scurries across typing-paper (people who collect and interpret these tracks are called ecklers)
- EROT an extremely sensuous breed of mink, related to the foreign exot
- ETY a family of birds (the gay ety is carefree and has an alternate lifestyle; the norori ety and propri ety are antagonistic)
- FECK a species of deer owned by royalty, granted to especially meritorious lieges (hence, feckless came to mean mediocre)
- FLAMBOY a tropical region where the ants are brightly-colored

- and extroverted (similar ants are found in the neighboring regions of Brill, Exuber, Jubil and Nonchal; by contrast, the ants of Eleph are gray and plodding)
- FLUMM the name of an ox found only in the Flumm region of the Russian steppes (it becomes disoriented when removed from its familiar surroundings)
- FRACA a sweet and gentle animal when by itself (but when fracas meet, fights inevitably ensue)
- FUNC a life-sustaining parasitic worm found only in living organisms (when the parasites depart, the host is defunct)
- GODAW a mythical mischievous spirit inhabiting people's mouths which makes screeching sounds when they try to sing (sometimes the noise is so terrible that we say the singing is godawful)
- HAP a small snail-like creature, believed by Orientals to bring good luck (confirmed by scientific study; hapless people are indeed unlucky)
- HEVEL a large dog, cousin to the kemp, especially bred to clean up the homes of those in distress (when the dog is away, the home soon reverts to its disheveled or unkempt look)
- IR dissemblers who creat great mischief but maintain an innocent, injured look when accused (no one thinks the fault is the irs)
- JUKE a wolflike creature that wails when caged (to this day, we refer to an enclosure that emits pitiful wailings as a jukebox)
- KUDO a cross between a kudzu and a buffalo (in Greek legend, receiving kudos in pairs is a great honor, but a lone kudo is a sign of disgrace)
- LETE the little insects whose crushed shells were used in medieval times to make ink (to delete errors, monks scraped lete ink off their parchment manuscripts)
- MINTON a racing bird (bad mintons have their feathers plucked to use as shuttlecocks for a popular lawn game)
- MISLE a strange mutation of bloodhound with no sense of smell (when a search goes astray, blame the dog and say you were misled)
- MOK a large swift dog related to the greyhound but uncontrollable (running a mok is exhausting)
- NER a lemming-like animal that loves company, like the misery (people who associate closely are said to be part ners)
- NI tiny athletic animals that love to play team games (their principal sport, ten nis, referring to the team size, has been adapted by humans)
- OREXIC a specially-bred, double-long dachshund (by simile, an extremely thin person is sometimes called an orexic)
- OT a jackal-like creature (friendly when small, but big ots take an irrational dislike to people)
- PHYSIC a mythic bear-like animal first described by Hippocrates (physics have relatively recently studied by Einstein)
- QUALM a small, nervous rodent, often domesticated (many people have qualms)
- RUPT a breed of watchdog traditionally used to guard banks, but ruined by overbreeding (it admits robbers without challenge, so a bank rupt leads a business to inevitable ruin)
- RUTH an extremely selfless species of dog whose qualities invari-

- ably rub off on its owner (to be contrasted with ruthless owners)
- SHRIFT a shrew whose memory is entirely contained in its tail (a short shrift has become synonymous with a lack of attention or memory)
- TANTAMOUNT the steed ridden by the Lone Ranger's sidekick
- THICAL according to Zen, a spirit that hovers over one and claps with one hand (is my thical purely imaginary?)
- THOG a usually docile pig-like animal (but the war thog is belligerent)
- TUITOUS a small dog, pet of the Roman gods who let him watch while they caused unexpected happenings on earth (such events are for Tuitous)
- TURM a cantankerous, whale-like creature (usually oil smooths troubled waters, but turm oil causes friction)
- UNATE a breed of messenger dog employed by the cavalry (Fort Apache was renamed Fort Unate when its messenger dog saved the soldiers from an Indian massacre)
- UND a social insect noted for overstaffing (the red und ant colony has many unnecessary workers)
- UNSEL a breed of fish in a Tasmanian lake noted for their altruism (the unsel fish leaps into fishing nets)
- VA a large hoofed mammal related to the deer that departs quickly when people are around
- WASH an extremely clean animal whose pelt is used for cloths and towels (its cousin is the much larger bath)
- WHEREA a species of fox adopted by the legal profession as a mascot (petitions are traditionally addressed to them "Whereas, the defendant did on the said date...)
- WIST a small, sad-faced monkey
- X a long-legged dog that guards leprechauns' treasures, named for its spread-eagled appearance when lying down (when a leprechaun buried a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, an X marks the spot)
- YBODY a species of fox which develops furtive habits in its fourth decade (you can't trust an ybody over thirty)
- YMORON a mysterious, self-contradictory ox that lives in the Parad region bordering on Orthod (the Parad ox does not mix well with the Orthod ox)
- ZANE a fun-loving hamster-like animal (its clowning can only be described as zany)
- ZLED a cousin of the koala addicted to bamboo shoots (the bamboo zled, easily fooled by hunters, is on the verge of extinction)

The above list can be endlessly expanded: the Kitten Caboodle, the Bureau Crat, the Acro Bat, the Brie Fly, the Gruntle, the Flabbergast, the Gist, the Lop, the Red Ecorate, the Embarr Ass, the Washb Owl and the Myriad beg to be described in detail. I recommend such creativity as a mental exercise and conversation piece to while away long car rides.