

## English grammar

# Collective nouns

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### Grammar rules with examples

Collective (or group) nouns are nouns that have a singular form but they describe groups of people, animals or things.

Groups of people: *family, police, team, crew*

Groups of animals: *colony, flock, herd*

Groups of things: *bunch, bundle, set*

### Collective nouns and verb agreement

Group (or collective) nouns can take a singular verb or plural verb: *The crew is/are on the ship.*

We use the singular verb if we refer to a group as a single unit.

*Our family is going on holiday to Spain in summer.*

*The herd is lying quietly in the shadow of trees.*

We use the plural verb if we refer to a group as a number of individuals.

*Our family are going on holiday to different places in summer.*

*The herd are looking in all directions. They are frightened.*

Similarly:

*The jury has just announced a decision.* (= a group acting as a single unit)

*The jury were not allowed to contact their families.* (= a group acting as a number of individuals)

### Collective nouns for animals

Examples of the most common collective nouns for groups of animals:

#### **Birds**

*a flock of birds, a gaggle of geese, a brood of hens, a clutch of chicks, a host of sparrows*

#### **Mammals**

*a herd of cows (sheep), a drove of pigs, a pack of wolves (dogs), a pride of lions, a troop of monkeys, a litter of puppies (kittens, cubs), a pod of dolphins*

#### **Fish**

*a school (shoal) of fish, a run of salmon, a battery of barracudas*

#### **Insects**

*a swarm of bees, a colony of ants, a cloud of grasshoppers, a scourge of mosquitoes*

#### **Reptiles**

*a float/bask of crocodiles (in water/on land), a lounge of lizards, a nest of snakes, a bale (dole) of turtles*

## Collective nouns for people

There are many collective nouns in English which refer to a group of people as a single unit or to individual members of a group and therefore can take a singular or plural verb (compare the examples above).

*family, police, team, crew, choir, board, government, committee, jury, staff, Manchester United...*

We can also use the following collective nouns to talk about groups of people.

*a board of directors, a caravan of travellers, a circle of friends, a flock of tourists, a tribe of Indians, a bevy of beauties, a crowd of people, a gang of youths*

## Collective nouns for things

Examples of the most common collective nouns to describe groups of things.

*a bouquet (bunch) of flowers, a bunch of keys, a bundle of sticks, a fleet of taxis (ships), a convoy of trucks, a flight of aeroplanes (stars), a clump of bushes, a round of drinks, a range of mountains, a pack of cards, a set of golf clubs*

## Collective nouns exercises:

[www.e-grammar.org/group-nouns-exercises/](http://www.e-grammar.org/group-nouns-exercises/)

**Our tip:** [www.e-grammar.org/pdf-books/](http://www.e-grammar.org/pdf-books/) All PDF exercises + grammar rules in one place.