What is the Collective Noun for a Group of Librarians?

by Kerrie Stevens

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At a recent theological librarian’s conference (ANZTLA 2012), this question was raised informally on a number of occasions, and without a clearly definitive outcome. I have taken it upon myself to see what possibilities could be used for the description of a group of librarians. In the process, I have discovered that we are not the only group of librarians to ponder the thought of what we should call ourselves ...

But first, what exactly is a collective noun? Nouns are people, places, and things. A special class of noun is the collective noun, naming groups composed of members. A collective noun is the name of a number of people or things taken together, described as a single group despite being composed of more than one person or thing. Grammatical rules describing the correct use of singular or plural verbs with collective nouns vary.

Some collective nouns descriptively label the people or things they are identifying, for example, a pride of lions. The Word Ancestry Journal describes the origin of the use of the word pride for a group of lions as coming “from the felines’ place at the top of the jungle food chain...As the nobility of the wild, lions were anthropomorphically given the same pride that human royalty carried due to their place in the social food chain.” Hence, in this and many other cases, the collective noun is often descriptive of the type of people, places or things it is identifying.

There has been a limited amount of discussion officially published on this particular topic. In what would seem to be an authoritative resource for collective nouns, the Dictionary of Collective Nouns and Group Terms, Sparkes lists not one, but two options for the collective noun for librarians; a sheaf of librarians, or a catalogue of librarians. In another published

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resource, Lipton says they should be known as a *shush* of librarians. Sparse as it is, these are about the limit of published resources that could be located. Online searching was the next step.

Several Google searches produced a myriad of possibilities. A number of bloggers have posed this question to their followers many times previously, often with numerous and humorous results. Michael Kelley submitted a collation of suggestions from a discussion thread on the Publib Listserv on this very topic. The suggestions are listed below:

- A *collection* of librarians
- A *hush* of librarians
- A *2.0* of librarians
- A *source* of librarians
- A *Dewey* of librarians
- A *gaggle* of librarians
- A *covey* of librarians
- A *bevy* of librarians
- A *MARC* of librarians
- A *query* of librarians
- A *chapter* of librarians
- A *shelf* of librarians
- A *niche* of librarians
- A *league* of librarians
- A *pride* of librarians
- A *renewal* of librarians
- An *OPAC* of librarians
- A *Google* of librarians
- A *reference* of librarians
- A *force* of librarians
- A *genre* of librarians
- A *riot* of librarians
- A *compendium* of librarians
- An *index* of librarians
- A *catalogue* of librarians
- A *stack* of librarians
- A *revelation* of librarians
- A *posse* of librarians
- A *class* of librarians
- A *volume* of librarians

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Other bloggers have had similar ideas too:

- A *bookish* of librarians
- An *alphabetisation* of librarians
- A *lush* of librarians
- A *quiet* of librarians
- A *litany* of librarians
- A *shush* of librarians.

Wiki Answers tries to claim definitively that the answer to the question is a *stack* of librarians but there is no discussion or explanation of how this came to be. As a collaborative group, it sounds plausible but has limited authority for application.

The Warrior Librarian Weekly has another compilation of possible collective nouns relevant to specific librarians and related occupations:

- An *album* of graphics librarians
- An *annoyance* of book sellers
- An *answer* of reference librarians
- An *account* of information brokers
- A *bureaucracy* of government document librarians
- A *book* of library pages
- A *brace* of dental librarians
- A *circuit* of operations librarians
- A *cobweb* of archivists
- A *constitution* of congressional librarians
- A *drawer* of cataloguers
- An *echo* of distance librarians
- An *exchange* of interlibrary loan librarians
- A *faith* of church librarians
- A *headline* of media librarians
- A *help* of assistant librarians
- A *humor* of librarians
- An *incarceration* of prison library trustees
- An *indemnity* of insurance librarians
- An *intimidation* of library assessors
- An *intrague* of corporate librarians
- A *liferaft* of outreach librarians
- A *litigation* of law librarians

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This posting takes it one step further to describe the various stages of librarians throughout a three day conference, calling it the ‘Conference Mutation Process’.

### Day 1
- **Arrival**: An excitement of librarians
- **Registration**: An anticipation of librarians
- **Keynote Address**: A reflection of librarians
- **First Workshop**: A development of librarians
- **Morning Tea**: A chatter of librarians
- **Trade Display**: A frenzy of librarians
- **Keynote 2**: A consideration of librarians
- **Workshop 2**: A renewal of librarians
- **Lunch**: A linkage of librarians
- **Workshop 3**: An animation of librarians
- **Optional Tour**: An amusement of librarians
- **Formal Dinner**: A glamour of librarians

### Day 2
- **Breakfast**: A hum of librarians
- **Keynote 3**: An attention of librarians
- **Workshop 4**: A tenuosity of librarians
- **Morning Tea**: A munch of librarians
- **Trade Display**: A browse of librarians
- **Keynote 4**: A politeness of librarians
- **Workshop 5**: An opportunity of librarians
- **Lunch**: A bloat of librarians
- **Keynote 5**: An auditorium of librarians
- **Workshop 6**: An arrangement of librarians
- **Informal Dinner**: A Bacchanalia of librarians

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There appears to be an unlimited list of possible terms to describe a group of librarians. It seems to be up to the particular group at the time as to what they’ll call themselves.

Day 3

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<td>Keynote 6</td>
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<td>Morning Tea</td>
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<td>Trade Display</td>
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<td>Keynote 7</td>
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<td>Workshop 8</td>
<td>An endurance of librarians</td>
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<td>Plenary/Evaluation</td>
<td>A tenacity of librarians</td>
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<td>AGM</td>
<td>A residue of librarians</td>
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<td>Optional Lunch</td>
<td>An absence of librarians</td>
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This very cleverly and accurately describes the many stages that librarians go through when attending conferences. However, as clever an aside as this is, it still doesn’t help answer the question of what do we call a group of librarians?

There appears to be an unlimited list of possible terms to describe a group of librarians. It seems to be up to the particular group at the time as to what they’ll call themselves.

Day Al-Mohamed lists a few more options not already considered above:

- A simmelband of librarians
- A collation of librarians
- A classification of librarians

Librarian Avengers’ Erica Firment asked her library readers to submit suggestions, and received numerous ideas already mentioned above, but a few unique ones too:

- A school of librarians
- A swarm of librarians
- A coven of librarians
- An exaltation of librarians
- A rabble of librarians
- A band of librarians
- A library of librarians
- An anthology of librarians
- A file of librarians
- A gang of librarians
- A shock of librarians
- A web of librarians
- A net of librarians
- A database of librarians
- A facet of librarians
- A binding of librarians

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Our colleagues in New Zealand have also been pondering this conundrum for some time. The School Library Association of New Zealand collected suggestions posted to their listserv during October 2009. Suggestions not already mentioned above include:

- A murder of librarians
- An idle of librarians

Yet another blogger, Jeremy Dibbell, posed the question on his blog PhiloBiblos. Some suggestions not already listed above, include:

- A literati of librarians
- A silence of librarians
- A luxury of librarians
- A murmuration of librarians
- An acquisition of librarians
- A liberation of librarians
- A literature of librarians
- An accession of librarians
- A circulation of librarians
- A listserve of librarians
- An omnipotence of librarians
- An omniscience of librarians
- A lettreset of librarians
- A literacy society of librarians

Many collective noun suggestions actually describe an aspect of our library work, or the stereotypical shushing librarian with glasses, twinset, pearls and a bun in her hair.”
Many collective noun suggestions actually describe an aspect of our library work, or the stereotypical shushing librarian with glasses, twinset, pearls and a bun in her hair. Is that fair? A number of newer, more technical terms have been suggested and are more relevant to the type of work many of us now do every day using many online resources.

Now that’s a long list of possibilities from simple Google searching, but what about something a little more ‘official’? Searches in a number of encyclopaedic, dictionary, humanities and social sciences and literature online databases resulted in no suggestions at all for the collective noun for a group of librarians. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* was no help.14 The State Library of Victoria was even consulted in the attempt to get an official ruling on the correct term, but even they couldn’t find anything.

So, what do we call ourselves? I guess that is still up for discussion, but basically, I say you can call yourselves whatever you like!

Although there is no official, accepted, definitive, authoritative term to be used, it would seem appropriate to use whatever term is relevant at the time for the specific group of librarians being grouped. My personal preference is a *collection* of librarians as it describes what we do (i.e. collecting information), how we do it (i.e. maintaining collections of items/sources etc) and what we do with them (i.e. collecting and sorting into groups, like with like).

So, from one librarian to a whole *collection* of librarians...enjoy!

A complete alphabetical listing of all suggested terms uncovered in my searchings is provided as supplementary materials to this article.

*Read Kerrie’s extensive list by downloading the supplementary file (on the right-hand-side under Reading Tools).*

**Bibliography**


