



THE TERMINOLOGY OF ANIMAL NAMES: A CROSSROAD OF  
LANGUAGE, SCIENCE, AND CULTURE

Mirjalol Ergashev

*Termez state university*

**Annotation:** *This article explores the terminology of animal names across scientific, linguistic, and cultural contexts, highlighting naming systems, symbolic meanings, and their importance in communication and biodiversity conservation.*

**Аннотация:** *В статье рассматривается терминология названий животных в научном, лингвистическом и культурном контексте, подчеркивая их значение для общения и сохранения биологического разнообразия.*

**Key words:** *Animal names, terminology, taxonomy, binomial nomenclature, common names, scientific names, gender-based terms, collective nouns.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Названия животных, терминология, таксономия, биномиальная номенклатура, общеупотребительные названия, научные названия, термины, основанные на поле, коллективные существительные.*

Animal names are not merely labels; they reflect deep connections between language, science, and human culture. Across history, societies have developed various ways to name, classify, and refer to animals based on biological features, utility, symbolic meaning, and linguistic traditions. This article explores the rich and multifaceted terminology of animal names, examining how they function in scientific taxonomy, everyday language, and cultural contexts.

#### Scientific Terminology: Binomial Nomenclature

One of the most standardized systems for naming animals is the binomial nomenclature developed by Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus in the 18th century. This system assigns every species a unique two-part Latin name:

- The first part indicates the genus (always capitalized),
- The second part specifies the species (lowercase). Examples include:
- *Homo sapiens* – humans
- *Canis lupus* – gray wolf
- *Panthera leo* – lion
- *Felis catus* – domestic cat

This system is universal and allows scientists across the world to communicate clearly, avoiding the confusion of regional or common names.

#### Common Names and Linguistic Diversity

While scientific names are fixed, common names for animals vary widely across languages, cultures, and even regions. A single species may have dozens of common names.



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For example, Puma concolor is known as:

- Cougar in the western U.S.,
- Mountain lion in California,
- Puma in South America,
- Panther in Florida.

This diversity reflects linguistic creativity, environmental relationships, and folk traditions.

### Gender and Age-based Terminology

Animal terminology also includes specialized names based on gender, age, or reproductive status, particularly for domesticated species:

Animal	Male	Female	Young
Horse	Stallion	Mare	Foal/Colt/Filly
Cow	Bull	Cow	Calf
Chicken	Rooster	Hen	Chick
Pig	Boar	Sow	Piglet
Deer	Buck/Stag	Doe	Fawn
Sheep	Ram	Ewe	Lamb

These terms are vital in agriculture, breeding, and veterinary practices.

### Collective Nouns (Group Names)

Another interesting feature in English animal terminology is collective nouns, which often carry poetic or historical connotations:

Animal	Group Name
Lions	Pride
Wolves	Pack
Crows	Murder
Fish	School
Birds	Flock
Bees	Swarm
Cattle	Herd

Some of these, like “a murder of crows,” originate from medieval hunting terms and persist today in literature and speech.

### Domesticated vs. Wild Animal Terms

The way animals are referred to often depends on their relationship with humans:

- Domesticated animals usually have more nuanced terminology (e.g., pets, livestock).
- Wild animals are commonly referred to in broader or more general terms. For instance:

- A dog might be referred to as a puppy, bitch, sire, or pet.



• A lion, on the other hand, may be simply called a lion, without further categorization unless in scientific or conservation contexts.

### Symbolic and Cultural Terminology

Animals have held symbolic meanings in myths, religions, and literature across cultures. This affects how they're named and spoken of.

Examples:

- Lion – power and nobility (e.g., "King of the Jungle")
- Owl – wisdom in Western cultures, but an omen in others
- Snake – deceit in Abrahamic religions, but rebirth in Hinduism
- Fox – cleverness or trickery in European and Asian folk tales

These symbolic meanings shape how people refer to animals metaphorically in language, such as calling someone "sly as a fox" or "brave as a lion."

### Ethnolinguistic and Folk Classifications

Many traditional societies classify animals not by scientific traits but by function, appearance, or behavior. This field is studied in ethnozoology.

For example:

- Some indigenous languages group bats with birds because they fly.
- In rural Uzbek or Kazakh folk terminology, terms like “yirtqich” (predator) or “uy hayvoni” (domestic animal) may override strict taxonomic classifications.

### Animals by Utility or Role

Animals are also classified by their practical use in human life:

- Pets – kept for companionship (e.g., cats, dogs, parrots)
- Livestock – raised for meat, milk, wool, or labor (e.g., cows, goats, horses)
- Game animals – hunted for sport or food (e.g., deer, ducks)
- Pests or vermin – harmful to crops or health (e.g., rats, cockroaches)

This terminology reflects the human-centered lens through which animals are often viewed.

### Modern Implications and Digital Terminology

In today's digital age, the terminology of animal names extends into new media, education, and virtual classification systems.

- Online databases like iNaturalist, Encyclopedia of Life, and ARKive rely on accurate scientific names to catalog global biodiversity.
- Machine learning and AI-based image recognition tools also depend on correct taxonomic labeling to identify species in the wild.
- In video games and virtual zoos (e.g., Zoo Tycoon or Minecraft), animals are often named by their common names, sometimes inaccurately, reflecting a balance between realism and playability.

Example: The term “buffalo” in North America commonly refers to bison, although scientifically they are different species. Such confusion highlights the need for accurate terminology, especially in global contexts.





### Challenges in Animal Terminology

Despite its usefulness, animal naming systems are not without complications:

#### A. Polysemy and Homonymy

Some animal names have multiple meanings or refer to different species in different regions:

- "Robin" in the UK refers to *Erithacus rubecula* (European robin),
- In the USA, it refers to *Turdus migratorius* (American robin).

#### B. Vernacular Bias

Common names can reflect colonial, gendered, or anthropocentric biases. For instance:

- The term “vermin” may include animals that are ecologically important but harmful to agriculture.
- Gendered terms like “bitch” (for female dog) have taken on negative connotations in other contexts.

#### C. Language Loss

Indigenous animal names are endangered along with minority languages. The loss of a language can mean the extinction of unique ecological knowledge embedded in its animal terminology.

### Interdisciplinary Importance

The study of animal name terminology spans multiple disciplines:

Field	Focus
<b>Linguistics</b>	Word formation, etymology, semantic fields of animal names
<b>Zoology</b>	Scientific classification and taxonomy
<b>Anthropology</b>	Cultural significance, folk classifications
<b>Ethnobiology</b>	Local knowledge and usage of animals in traditional societies
<b>Education</b>	Teaching biodiversity through structured nomenclature
<b>Literature/Folklore</b>	Symbolism and metaphors (e.g., Aesop’s fables, animal proverbs)

This shows how naming animals is not just a scientific endeavor but a deeply cognitive, social, and cultural practice.

### Towards a Universal Understanding

In a globalized world, where species are increasingly threatened by extinction, and conservation efforts span across continents, a shared and accurate system of animal terminology is vital.

- International agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), use scientific names to identify protected species.
- CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) ensures that commercial naming does not obscure the identity of endangered fauna.



Unified naming helps prevent poaching, supports biodiversity research, and enhances ecological education worldwide.

#### Conclusion (Expanded)

The terminology of animal names reflects a rich tapestry of science, culture, utility, and identity. From the precise Latin names of Linnaean classification to the colorful and varied folk terms across the globe, the way humans name animals tells us more about ourselves than the animals we name.

Whether it's the regal lion of fables, the faithful dog of everyday life, or the unknown insect identified via a scientific app, each name holds layers of meaning. It encapsulates evolution, language history, social function, and even political perspective.

In preserving and studying animal names—scientific, common, and cultural—we not only strengthen our communication and conservation efforts but also honor the deep relationships humans have cultivated with the animal kingdom for millennia.

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