

**THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES NAMES: A LOOK INTO ANIMAL NAME
ETYMOLOGY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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Abstract:

Each name serves as a key to a story. The weight and wisdom of our predecessors' observations and insights are embodied in every term, whether it is an ode to mythological deities, an echo of an animal's cry in the wild, or a detailed description of odd physical features. By figuring out the derivation of animal names, we not only preserve the linguistic legacy that provides a window into the past of civilizations, but we also deepen our comprehension of nature. By examining these aspects within the article, readers can gain a deeper appreciation for the way language encapsulates ecological diversity and human ingenuity.

Key words: etymology, origin of names, wild animals, linguistic evolution, cultural influence, historical context, folk etymology, loanwords.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.2024/hk5nxs75>

Introduction

Understanding the etymology of species names involves a journey across different disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, natural history, and even geography. This multidimensional pursuit reveals more than just the origin of names; it reflects the history of human knowledge and interaction with these animals. Through the study of etymology, we learn how language has evolved. For instance, many animal names in English are borrowed from other languages, often Latin or Greek, which were historically used in the scientific classification of species. Exploring these roots can provide a fascinating glimpse into the evolution of taxonomy and how it has shaped our understanding of biological diversity. Some animals are named after figures from mythology or with reference to cultural beliefs. The names often mirror the significance humans have attributed to these creatures and can vary substantially from culture to culture. Understanding the names of species also has direct implications for conservation efforts. Names that underscore a species' rarity, its unique habitat, or its role in the ecosystem can raise awareness and sensitivity toward the challenges faced by these animals. By exploring etymologies, we remind ourselves of the diversity of life and the importance of preserving it. These geographical attributions are more than just identifiers; they spin a narrative of discovery and exploration, and sometimes they preserve the names of lost or ancient places. The naming of species is far from a static or dry exercise; it's a window into our world's complex tapestry, infused with science, art, and the fundamental human curiosity that drives us to know and name the beings with whom we share our planet.

Materials and methods

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Many linguists have studied the etymology of the English language. Some particularly influential scholars including Eric Partridge[2], Ernest Weekley[3], Anatoly Liberman[1], Philip Durkin[4], and many others have contributed to our understanding of where English words come from and how they have taken their current forms. The study of etymology in the English language is an ongoing and ever-expanding field, with new research continually contributing to our knowledge base. Investigating the etymology of animal names involves several scholarly methods. These strategies combine linguistic analysis with historical research to uncover the origins and development of words. Linguists study the historical development of languages to understand how words have evolved. This involves comparing cognates (words that have a common origin) across different languages. Examining ancient texts and historical documents to find the earliest uses of words and tracing their origins and changes in meaning over time. Utilizing dictionaries, especially historical and etymological dictionaries, allows researchers to see how the definitions and spellings of words have changed. Drawing from other academic disciplines such as anthropology, zoology, and botany to understand cultural, historical, and biological contexts that have influenced the naming of animals. Breaking down words into their constituent parts roots, prefixes, suffixes to uncover their structure and original forms. Through these methods, we can uncover not just the origins of animal names but also the journeys these names have undertaken across languages and through time, reflecting a confluence of culture, history, and science.

Discussion and results

When annotating etymology, it's important to consider the interplay of different languages, cultural exchanges, and the physical characteristics or behaviors that led to the naming of an animal. Some names have a straightforward derivation, while others might have a more complex historical background involving multiple language influences. Here some examples of such animal names:

1. "Elephant"- from Middle English "elefaunt", from Old French "elefant", from Latin "elephantus", from Greek "elephas" (genitive "elephantos"), probably from a non-Indo-European language, likely Phoenician. The word is related to the animal's large size and distinctive shape [5].

2. "Tiger"- through Middle English "tigre", from Old English "tigras" (plural), and Latin "tigris", which is derived from the Greek word "tigris", which possibly originated from a Persian source. The name emphasizes the animal's fierce and striped appearance [6].

3. "Kangaroo"- An English loanword from the Guugu Yimithirr, an Australian Aboriginal language, possibly from "gangurru", referring to a grey kangaroo. The name was first recorded as "kanguru" on 12 July 1770 in an entry in the diary of Sir Joseph Banks; this was during Lieutenant James Cook's first voyage to the Pacific [7].

4. "Giraffe" - The name comes from the Arabic word "zarāfah", possibly meaning "fast-walker". The word was used in Middle English as "gerfauntz", and has been influenced by the Italian name "giraffa" from around the 16th century [8].

5. "Hippopotamus"- From Late Latin "hippopotamus", from Greek "hippopotamos", from "hippos" meaning "horse" and "potamos" meaning "river" hence "river horse" reflecting the animal's semi-aquatic lifestyle and some horse-like physical features [9].

6. “Rhinoceros”- the word originates through Latin from the Ancient Greek “rhinokerōs”, which is composed of “rhino-” (“nose”) and “kerōs” (“horn”), an apt description of this animal’s most prominent features [10].

The etymology of animal names often uncovers a tapestry of linguistic influences including Old and Middle English, Latin, Greek, indigenous languages, and various modern languages. This reflects the history of cultural contacts and trade, colonial exploration, and scientific exchanges. A significant number of animal names have been chosen based on a description of the animal itself. This might include physical traits (like with the “rhinoceros” or “nose horn”), behaviors (such as “squirrel” from a Greek word meaning “shadow tail”), or habitats (“hippopotamus” or “river horse”). Some names reflect various cultural or mythological significance attributed to animals. For instance, the “lemur” meaning “spirits of the dead” in Latin, indicates how the animal’s nocturnal habits influenced its name based on local mythologies. The usage of local names by indigenous populations that were then adapted into English highlights the importance of original interactions with these species. “kangaroo” and “wombat” are examples of names derived from Aboriginal Australian languages. Learning the etymology of wild animal names can be quite a rewarding endeavor, and it has several important aspects. The etymology of animal names often provides insight into the languages and cultures that named them. This knowledge helps to appreciate the interconnections of language, culture, and the natural world throughout human history. By understanding the roots of animal names, it can be easier to remember and recall them. Etymologies often provide mnemonic aid since the names can be associated with their meanings or the reasons they were given. An animal’s name can sometimes reflect an aspect of its habitat or behavior that is crucial to its survival. Understanding these can foster a deeper appreciation for the species and highlight the importance of their conservation. Some animal names have deep cultural, spiritual, or mythological significance. Learning etymology helps in respecting and acknowledging the cultural heritage and the value systems associated with these animals. By studying the etymology of wild animal names, one can not only enhance his or her engagement with the world of natural history but also contribute to a broader understanding and communication across different fields of knowledge.

Conclusion

In concluding exploration of the etymology of animal names, it’s clear that such an investigation is much more than a simple tracing of linguistic roots. The study of these names opens a broad perspective on the interaction between language, culture, and science throughout human history. The names we use for animals are more than mere labels; they carry with them the weight of our collective curiosity about the natural world, our drive to classify and understand it, and our desire to convey this understanding through language. In short, the investigation of animal name etymologies not only enhances our understanding of the English language but also provides a window into historical human-animal interactions, the influence of different cultures on English, and the evolving nature of taxonomy. It deepens our connection to the natural world through language and history, reinforcing the complex relationships forged over centuries between human societies and the animal kingdom.

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