



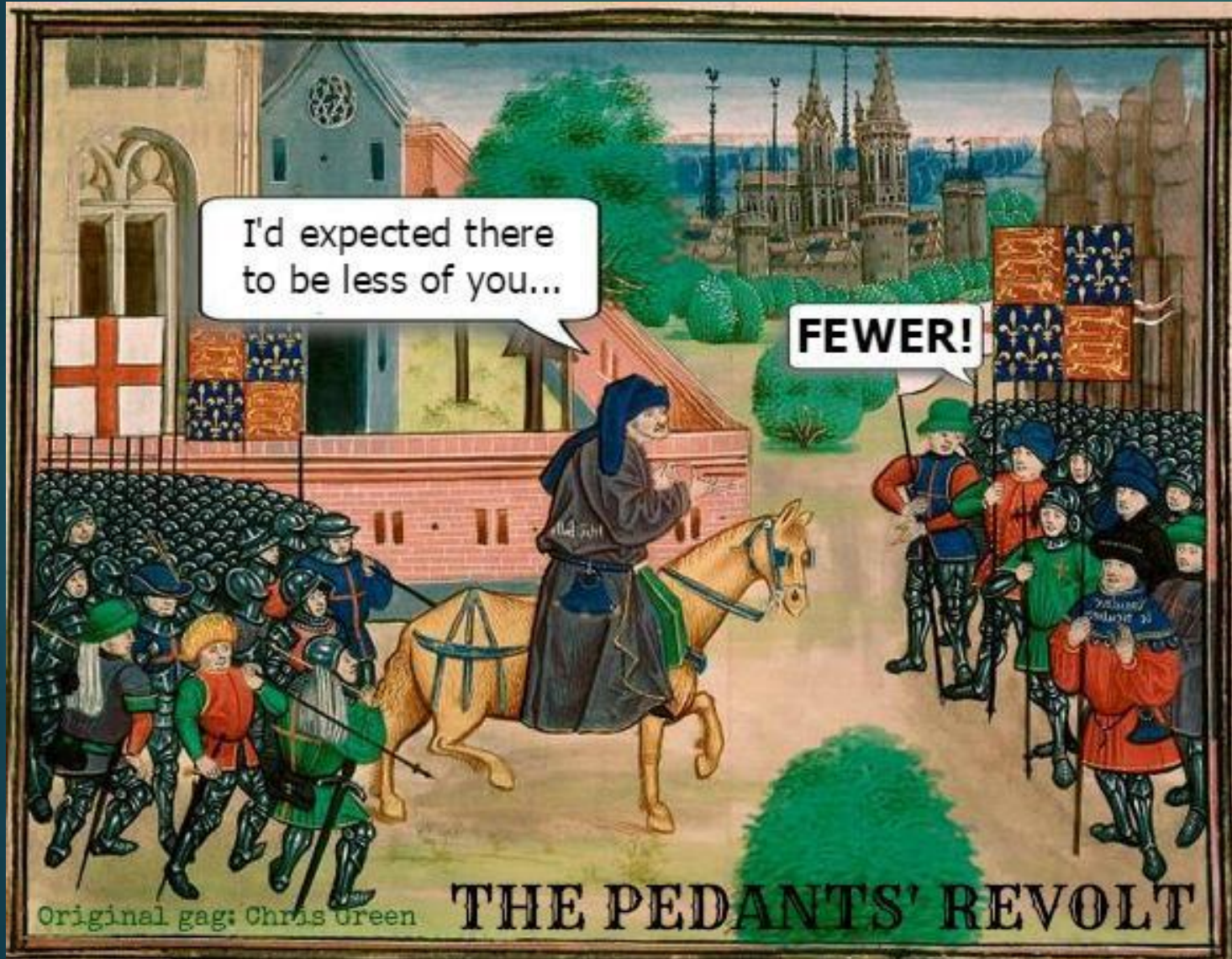
English-is-weird Series

GRAMMAR POLICE



**GRAMMAR
NEWSFLASH**

GRAMMAR NEWSFLASH



SINGULAR / PLURAL
CONUNDRUMS IN
ENGLISH



GRAMMAR NEWSFLASH

SINGULAR / PLURAL CONUNDRUMS, *QUICK TEST /20*

What is the plural form of the following words:

- Thesis
- Index
- Luggage
- Roof
- Hoof
- Fish
- Alumnus
- Person
- Shrimp
- Fruit
- Criterion
- Aircraft

Are these nouns singular or plural?
(sing/plural/depends...)

- Data
- News
- Mathematics
- Police
- Staff
- Family
- Means
- Species



GRAMMAR NEWSFLASH

SINGULAR / PLURAL CONUNDRUMS IN ENGLISH

BASIC LEVEL:

- Adding 's' modifies noun in the following cases (examples):
 - e.g. knife => knives. A few exceptions: proof, roof, etc.
 - city => cities (proper nouns and names excepted: Shelby => the Shelbys)
 - bonus => bonuses (but see below for exceptions)
 - potato => potatoes. Exception: "loan words" consciously borrowed from foreign languages: simply 's' or special rules apply, cf. espresso/espressos).



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SINGULAR / PLURAL CONUNDRUMS IN ENGLISH

Irregular plurals:

- From old and middle-English: child/children; mouse/mice; ox/oxen etc.
- From foreign languages - NB: for foreign 'loan words', it sometimes depends heavily on speaker pedantry...
 - Greek: topos/topoi (or toposes...); criterion / criteria
phenomenon/phenomena (or phenomenons...)
 - Latin: curriculum/curricula; cactus/cacti, alumnus/alumni [but viruses not 'viri', and data 'is' not 'are' mostly nowadays =has become *uncountable* sometimes]
 - NB: words ending in -is, -ix or -ex (from either Greek or Latin, sometimes Greek-through-Latin or French) have specific plurals: analysis/analyses; thesis/theses; index/indices (sometimes indexes)
 - Hebrew: mitzvah/mitzvot(h); Italian: cello / celli (etc.)



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SINGULAR / PLURAL CONUNDRUMS IN ENGLISH

Tricky situations:

- Some words **look plural** but are in fact **singular**: e.g. means (''a means to an end''), a species, a TV series, mathematics, ethics, news...
- **Countable/uncountable** (well known to you, I just mention it in passing): information, luggage, news, fruit (ambiguous nowadays) and countless other words.
- If uncountable = **never plural + never counted** (not even 'a'), specific grammar (less not fewer, etc.)
- Countable nouns that **keep the same form in the plural**: fish, deer, shrimp, trout, sheep (many animals in fact): a fish, two fish. But also words like aircraft (two aircraft, **not** two aircrafts).
- Can be plural (fishes) only if it means *different types/species* of fish or if you impersonate Italian-American mobsters (''sleep with the fishes'')



GRAMMAR NEWSFLASH

SINGULAR / PLURAL CONUNDRUMS IN ENGLISH

Tricky situations:

- Some words **look singular** but are in fact **plural**...
- Typically: “Cattle” or “police”: **never** singular in English: ‘The cattle are restless’; ‘The police are coming’.
- Individual members = add man/woman or officer: ‘Ten police officers were awaiting them in the lobby’. Reference to several groups that count as “police” = different police forces / departments.
- **Collective nouns = groups of people** are a special case: staff, family, team, squad, platoon, posse, Netflix, Paris 1, the government, etc.
- The associated verb can usually be singular or plural **depending on what you want to emphasize** = as a tightly-knit unit, or as several people.
- Example: ‘‘The McCoy family comes from Laredo’’ BUT ‘‘my family are coming over for Thanksgiving’’.
- However, American English usually prefers singular over plural <> Brits...



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Bonus: specific nouns of groups of items/animals

Sheep

A **flock** of sheep

Wolves

A **pack** of wolves

Fish

A **school/shoal** of fish

Wild horses

A **herd** of wild horses

Lions

A **pride** of lions

Coyotes

A **band** of coyotes

Puppies

A **litter** of puppies/kittens

Crows

A **murder** of crows

Ships

A **fleet** of ships

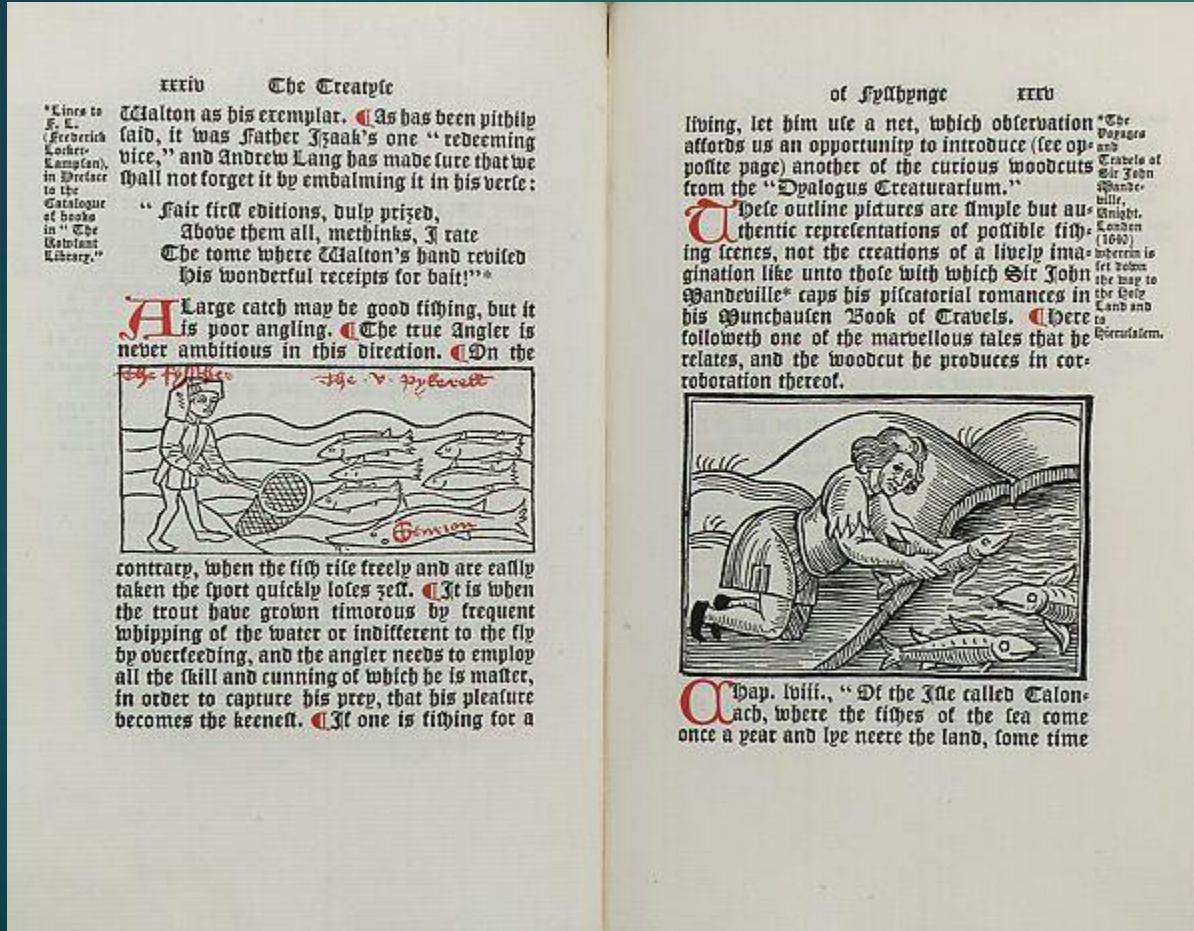
Flowers

A **bunch** of flowers

bees

A **swarm** of bees

The BOOK OF SAINT ALBANS – THE BOKE OF SEYNT ALBANS [printed 1486] probably written by Dame Juliana Berners



Major medieval source for
most playful collective
names for animals, plus a
few others...

e.g. a 'blast of hunters' / a
'superfluity of nuns'...



GRAMMAR NEWSFLASH

TEST RESULTS?

COVID-19

C

T

- Coronavirus
 - ☐ SARS
 - ☐ MERS
 - ☒ COVID-19

Positive



GRAMMAR NEWSFLASH

SINGULAR / PLURAL CONUNDRUMS, QUICK TEST /20

What is the plural form of the following words:

- Thesis/**theses**
- Index/**indexes** or **indices**
- Luggage / Uncount
- Roof / **Roofs**
- Hoof / **Hooves**
- Fish / **Fish**
- Alumnus / **Alumni**
- Person / **People** (**but not always...**)
- Shrimp / **depends**
- Fruit / **Uncount**
- Criterion / **Criteria**
- Aircraft / **aircraft**

Are these nouns singular or plural?

(sing/plural/depends...)

- Data (depends)
- News (sing)
- Mathematics (sing)
- Police (plural)
- Staff (depends)
- Family (depends)
- Means (sing *and* plural)
- Species (sing *and* plural)