

Julia's Zine #2 August 2026

Stupid Animal Names



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Introduction, Pot Belly

One of the things that really annoys me is giving stupid pseudo Latin or Greek names to animals.

It started with the Greeks.

They went to north Africa and were shown this huge beast on the river banks.



Did they name it for its pot belly or its fat legs?

Pot Belly continued

“We are civilised, philosophers, we will not fat shame that poor creature.”

It's peg like teeth?

“It just needs some orthodontic work.

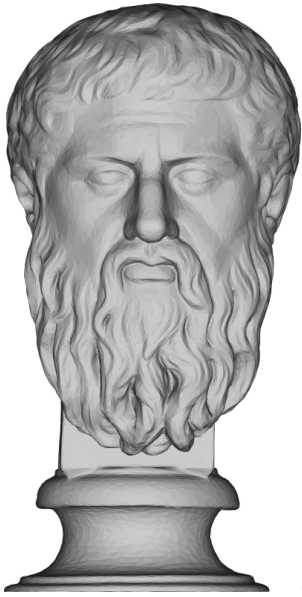


We shall call it
hippopótamos
which means
Water horse in
our language.”

Love to see you saddle that buster!

Largest

A few hundred years later, after stealing the Greeks' religion, philosophy, the mathematics they had stolen from Egypt, and even the sitcom¹, the Romans conquered Greece without losing their inferiority complex.



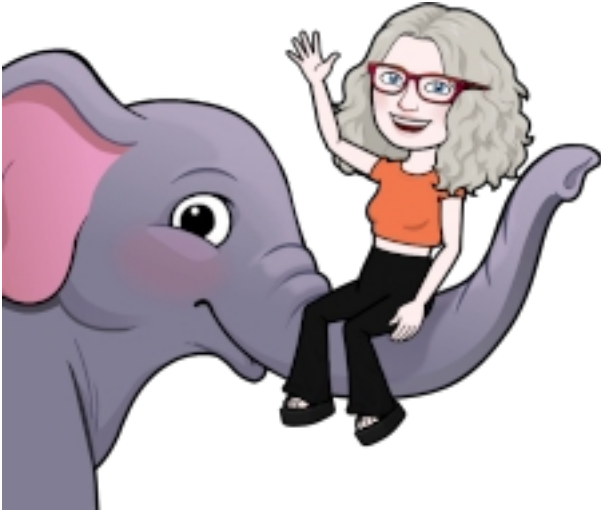
Whatever the Greeks had done, they had to do one better.

Hannibal introduced them to the largest living land animal.

¹ Strictly speaking the “New Comedy”, but the stock characters and hackneyed plots remind me of 1960s TV sitcoms more than anything.

Largest, continued

Did they name it for being the largest?



“Well, the Greeks didn’t.”

What about its big flappy ears, the long flexible nose,

the legs like umbrella stands, or the stickyouty teeth?

“No! No! No! No!”

They called it Elephas, possibly from Phoenician through Greek and we have no proof what that meant².

² Possibly “Ivory”

The Great Renaming



Scroll
forward a
couple of
thousand
years and

the French Academy realised it was too hard for their baguette addled brains to have a different name for every species of megafauna and decided to call all the big herbivores "Pachyderme" from Greek pakhúdérma (thick+skin).

Because you need a thick skin to deal with the French?

Or was it the Romans?

Lizard

While Europe was busy conquering the world, the Americans scratched in the dirt and dug up the fossils of what we believe were the largest animals to ever walk the Earth.



Did they name them for being the largest?

You know the answer, of course not. Tradition or an old charter or something.

What about the long neck and tiny head or the tail just the same but no head or the secondary brain in its arse?

NEVER!

They named it "Sauropod" meaning "Lizard foot" like every other four footed reptile.

Webbed Feet

When the English got to Australia, they were shown a living animal that laid eggs and made milk!



Did they name it the Scrambled-Egg beast?

“No, that requires a sense of humour!”

What about its face that was uncannily like a duck's?

Webbed Feet, continued

“Only common people would do that!”

They called it Platypus which is either Greek for "Flat footed" or modern Australian for "overpriced sports shoes".



Historical note:
Platypus was already used for a weevil so it got changed ... to Ornithorhynchus anatinus the Greek + Latin for duck-like bird-snout. Talk about irony.

Birds

Then the English came to New Zealand and were shown the bones and feathers & allegedly even some preserved skin of what we believe to be tallest bird that ever walked the Earth.



Did they name it for being the tallest?

You must know the answer by now. "No!"

What about the long neck & the small head? Ah, we already did that in the Lizards chapter. "Of course not!"



They called it "Diornis" from Latin "Terrible Bird" but a smaller member of the family was named

Birds, continued

Anomalopteryx didiformis meaning *deformed wing* like a dodo.



The only things the Moa & the Dodo have in common are they are both extinct flightless birds. The Moa didn't even have wings.

At least the name Dodo makes some sense.

It's probably from the Dutch "Dodaars", meaning "Fat-bottom." which makes me wonder: Do moa walk around bird heaven asking "Does extinction make my bum look big?" or is it a case of "Dodaars don't tell?"

Yes, I really did write this whole zine just to get that ghastly pun in, hopefully you laughed & that's what comedy is about. Come see me on stage.

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