

Funny Names

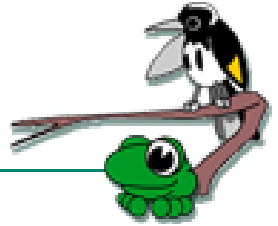
Why have plants and animals got such funny sounding names and what do they refer to?

Scientists have sorted plants (flora) and animals (fauna) into groups according to common features or characteristics that they share. The correct scientific term for this is taxonomy. Sounds a little confusing? Well, not really. Let's look at an example. Think about cutlery.

As you know, cutlery is the term used to describe a whole range of implements we use to eat and prepare our food. Knives, forks and spoons make up this one big group or *family* called cutlery. But, as we know, knives, forks and spoons look very different to each other so if we want to find out more about the special characteristics each of these share we split them into another group called a *genus*. We now have spoons making up one group or *genus*, forks another and knives another. Let's just focus on one of these - spoons.

As you bright sparks would have already realised, there are a number of different types of spoons we use, teaspoons, tablespoons, dessert spoons, wooden spoons and so on. All very different but sharing a similar characteristic of being a spoon. Because of these differences we would describe each group as a different *species* of spoon, so teaspoons would be one species, tablespoons another. Most types of spoon do not have a common name, however, to illustrate the 'taxonomy' of spoons we might call a teaspoon 'the stirrer' which would become its common name.

Family	Genus	Species	Common name
Cutlery	Knives	Steak knife Fish knife Carving knife Bread knife	'Beefie' Scaly Slicer Loafer
	Forks	Dessert fork Meal fork Roasting fork	'Sweetie' Mighty Pronger
	Spoons	Teaspoon Tablespoon Dessert spoon Wooden spoon	'The Stirrer' Scooper 'Sweetie' 'The Mixer'



If you think of this example and then apply it to how scientists group plants and animals it makes it a little easier. Look at the following examples:

Cutlery	Plant	Animal
Family: Cutlery	Family: Myrtaceae	Family: Tarsipedidae
Genus: <i>Spoons</i>	Genus: <i>Eucalyptus</i>	Genus: <i>Tarsipes</i>
Species: <i>teaspoon</i>	Species: <i>marginata</i>	Species: <i>rostratus</i>
Common name: 'The Stirrer'.	Common name: Jarrah	Common name: Honey possum.

How would you classify or group *Banksia menziesii* (pronounced *bank-see-a men-zee-see-eye*) or the Firewood Banksia? Which is the genus name, species name and common name?

Try the following:

Malurus splendens or Splendid Fairy-wren.

Litoria moorei or Motorbike Frog.

Pseudonaja affinis or Dugite

Tachyglossus aculeatus or Echidna