

# 21 French Animal Sounds: Squawk, Neigh and Squeak Like Francophone Fauna

## 1. Pigs — *Groin-groin*

French porkers are not happy about their destinies as andouillettes, apparently; the description of their oinks in French is *un cochon grogne*, literally meaning “a pig grumbles.” The noun for an oink is also *une grogne*, which also means dissatisfaction.

## 2. Snakes — *Siff, Sss*

As the French would have it, “the snake hisses” is said as *le serpent siffle*. The verb *siffler* also means “to whistle,” whether with your own lips or a referee’s whistle. I’ve never heard a snake make a sound at all close to this, personally, but they’re possibly the creepiest animals on the planet, so I wouldn’t put it past them.

## 3. Roosters — *Cocorico*

The world’s languages’ attempts to imitate the sound of a rooster are arguably the most fun words ever invented, and French’s *cocorico* (cock-a-doodle-do) is no exception. *Un coq chante* means, literally, “a rooster sings.”

## 4. Chickens — *Cotcotcodet*

*La poule caquète*, or “the chicken clucks.” The verb *caqueter* means to prattle on or gossip, which seems to be a very proper way to describe the yammering of a bunch of chickens.

## 5. Chicks — *Piou-piou*

The chirping of chicks is *piou-piou*, a word that is sometimes also employed to describe toddlers or babies.

## 6. Donkeys — *Hi Han*

*L’âne braît* means “the donkey brays,” and as with English, the verb also means to speak or sing too loudly for comfort. But don’t bother trying to explain “I bray” to French people. In an odd fluke, the verb’s present tense only conjugates in [the third person singular](#) (as with *pleuvoir*, to rain). You’ll have to just bray at them instead.

## 7. Ducks — *Coin Coin*

A duck's noise-making is described as *le canard cancan*, and the verb *cancaner* can also mean to gossip.

As for *cancan*, it is a noun for squawks, gossip and—as in English—the lively 19th-century dancing depicted by Toulouse-Lautrec, pictured below.

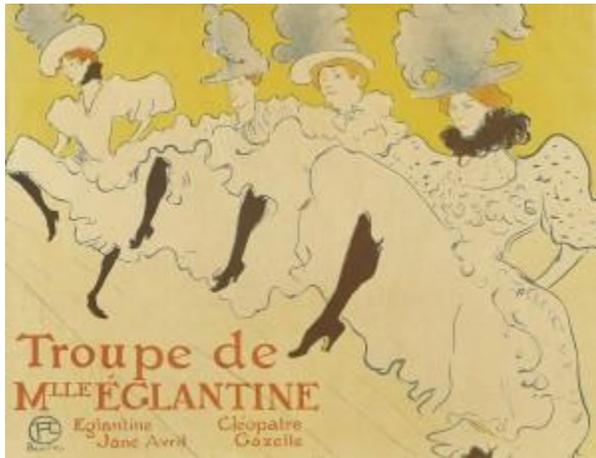


Image Source: [Wikipedia](#)

## 8. Frogs — *Croac Croac*

*La grenouille coasse*, or “the frog croaks.” Be careful what sweet nothings you whisper to your imagined prince-to-be, however, as the verb *coasser* also means to gossip about or bad-mouth someone. French frogs are apparently not to be trusted with secrets!

## 9. Crows — *Crôa Crôa*

*Le corbeau croasse* means “the crow caws.” And yes, both the onomatopoeia and the verb are confusingly close to those used for frogs, even though the sounds that the two animals make are quite different.

## 10. Cows — *Meuh*

*La vache mugit*, or “the cow moos.” Strangely, the verb *mugir* is also used to describe the wailing of sirens. Perhaps not surprisingly for a country so obsessed with cheese and dairy, French has an endless supply of expressions involving the word *vache* (cow).

A few you should know are:

- ***La vache !*** (A general exclamation of surprise, a bit like our “holy cow,” but not as dated or cheesy)
- ***Amour vache*** (Love-hate relationship)
- ***Bouffer de la vache enragée*** (To live hand-to-mouth; literally: to chow down on the rabid cow)

And, finally, the expression that all French learners fear:

- ***Parler français comme une vache espagnole*** (To speak terrible French; literally: to speak French like a Spanish cow).

## 11. Cats — *Miaou* (Meow), *Ronron* (Purr)

As with English, French has a range of verbs to describe the noises made by cats in various emotional states: *le chat feule* means “the cat yowls,” *le chat miaule* means “the cat meows” and *le chat ronronne* means “the cat purrs.”

## 12. Pigeons, Doves — *Rou Rou*

*Le pigeon roucoule* (the pigeon coos) is how you can describe a cooing pigeon. While the French don’t agree with us about the consonants spoken by pigeons and doves, they do agree that the sounds are soft and agreeable.

Thus, *roucouler* can be used in a figurative sense in the same way as the English verb “to coo”:  
*Les amoureux roucoulent* (The lovers coo.)

## 13. Bee — *Bzzzz*

*L’abeille bourdonne* means “the bee buzzes.” As in English, other things can also buzz: *la machine bourdonne* (the machine buzzes). And, if you have the misfortune to experience a French heavy metal concert, afterwards you can say that your ears are ringing (literally: buzzing), “*J’ai les oreilles qui bourdonnent.*”

## 14. Birds (Generally) — *Cui Cui*

Those of us not adept at identifying particular kinds of bird can chirp at fowl generally with *cui cui*. When you do so, *tu gazouilles* (you are chirping). Babies are also said to *gazouiller*, or babble.

## 15. Horse — *Hiiii*

*Le cheval hennit* (the horse whinnies) with a *hiiiiiii* in French-speaking lands.

## 16. Lion — *Raoh*

*Le lion rugit* (the lion roars), and as in English, the French are also known to *rugir de colère* (roar with anger) in certain situations.

## 17. Turkey — *Glou Glou*

*Le dindon glougloute* (the turkey gobbles) is how a turkey makes noise in French. In human circles, you're likely to hear the phrase *être le dindon de la farce* (to wind up the laughing stock), as *un dindon* isn't just a male turkey, but also a fool, an idiot, a dope.

The greatest piece of French literature ever written, in my very personal and not widely shared opinion, is [Georges Feydeau's farce "Le Dindon."](#) which has been translated—obviously with some difficulty—as “Sauce for the Goose” and “An Absolute Turkey.” A better title translation might have been “The Complete Moron,” don't you think? I'd of course recommend just reading (or better, [watching](#)) it in the original French.

## 18. Owls — *Ouh Ouh*

*Le hibou hulule* means “the owl hoots.” More figuratively, people can be said to *hululer* in pain.

## 19. Dogs — *Ouaf Ouaf, Wouf Wouf*

Dogs, we all know, have a lot to say, and Francophone canines are no different. *Un chien aboie* (a dog barks), *clabaude* (barks when it's not supposed to during a hunt), *glapit* (yelps), *grogne* (growls), *gronde* (gives a low growl), *hurle* (howls), and *jappe* (yaps, yips).

Note particularly the useful *clabauder*; Outside of dog hunts it can be used to mean speaking out of turn or protesting when it's really not necessary.

## 20. Crocodile (Devouring Human) — *Clap*

Know that when a crocodile snaps its jaws shut around your flesh, the French will hear this sound as *clap*. The verbs used to describe crocodile communication are *lamentier* and *vagir*.

## 21. Goat — *Bêê*

We seem to be missing a verb for goat speech in English, but in French, *un chèvre béguète*. If you've spent any time in a French cheese shop, you know that goat cheeses are also called *chèvre*. If you haven't, what on earth have you been eating?