Marshnotes®



BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY SUMMER 2014

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Managers of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary Since 1963

- dedicated to the conservation and study of migratory waterfowl-

Marshnotes:

Editor: Kathleen Fry

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Submissions, articles, photographs and letters for publication may be sent to the above email address marked for attention of Marshnotes Editor. Please include your telephone number and the Editor will contact you.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

October 15th, 2014

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Hours of Operation: 9:00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. every day. The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible.

Admission: Members: Free

Non-Members: Adults: \$5 Children (2-14 yrs) and Seniors (60yrs +): \$3 School Groups: Special discounts available; pre-booking is required.

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Bring your friends and come support our Sanctuary 's 26th Annual

PIG & CORN ROAST

At the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary Saturday, September 6th 2014



Tickets

Adults: \$20 Kids 7-12 yrs: \$10 Kids under 7 yrs: FREE

To order, call 604 946 6980.

This will be our last Pig & Corn Roast, so to make sure you get a ticket, please purchase them by 4 pm Friday, Sept.5th at the Gift Shop. Tickets will not be available at the dinner.

Happy Hour starts at 5 pm. Dinner Call is between 5:30-6:00 pm. The Raffle Prize Draw starts after dinner, and the event wraps up by 8:30 pm. Volunteer help is always welcome for event set-up and tear-down, as well as food preparation and serving.

About Our Covers:

Front Cover: Gosling Pair © Jim Martin

Back Cover: Green Heron © Peter Nielsen

A Note From The Editor:

The most useful photos for Marshnotes are those featuring something in the three months covered by that edition. The best approach is to send thumbnails or reduced images or links to posted images. I will then contact you for higher resolution versions. See page 2 for my email and upcoming deadlines. Kathleen Fry

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Kathleen Fry

Varri Raffan Varri Raffan

Kathleen Fry

Manager's Report

Summer is here, and it is hard to believe we are already well into July. April, May and June have been very busy months here at the Sanctuary, with 21,820 visitors over the three months, the passage of spring migrants, and the nesting, rearing and moulting of our summer birds.

April is an interesting month. Arctic-nesting migrants are often still here in large numbers, fueling up for the next stage of their journey north. Several thousand Snow Geese, for example, were regularly just offshore most of April, although thousands more were often feeding over by Brunswick Point, Westham Island fields or in Richmond. On the third week in April, the peak numbers of Western Sandpipers moved through the Fraser Delta, with small flocks visiting the Sanctuary but the majority congregating in thousands just south of Brunswick Point. April is also the month that our diving ducks all depart, as well as most of our Mallards. Within the Sanctuary ponds, for example, in mid-April, Mallard numbers dropped from over 1000 to just over 100 birds.

Most of April was spent monitoring duck and goose nests and setting up barriers for the pending Sandhill Crane nesting season. Waterfowl nesting sites were in high demand this spring, as there wasn't much cover in early April due to a heavy snowfall flattening a lot of the grass. Cool wet April weather resulted in little new plant growth. Territorial disputes of nesting birds occurred all through the sanctuary as a result. Nests with inadequate screening from predators (and our visitors) were regularly disturbed or destroyed.

At the re-constructed crane island (or "nestoration" site, as one photographer called it), there were daily Canada Goose attempts to re-claim the island from the Sandhill Cranes. A Canada Goose pair had tried nesting on the island in early April, but their eggs were quickly predated by gulls and crows. When the cranes started their nest on the same spot a few days later, they were more successful, but the goose flock in the pond would not leave the island alone. All through the crane incubation, and particularly around the nest hatch day, even when a chick was present, geese constantly tried to climb onto the island and sit just out of beak reach of the sitting parent crane. The male crane usually acted quickly to evict them, but the female crane seemed either intimidated or unwilling to be distracted from her nesting mission. She sometimes gave an alarm call to bring the male back to deal with these noisy neighbours, though.

It is likely that most these birds were some of our oneyear old non-breeding Canada's just learning to defend territories, as the mature birds had already secured most of the better nest sites. At the same time



Sandhill Crane female protecting the first hatching chick, with two Canada Geese looking on. Photo: Kathleen. Fry

in early May, a dozen or so other non-breeding geese took to honking loudly from roof tops of the house and Gift Shop, the Warming Hut, the Lecture Hall, the cab of a visitor's shiny red truck and even the roof of a motorhome. When the whole flock finally started their annual moult in late May and stayed at ground level for a while, the Sanctuary quietened down considerably.

Between the lack of cover and predation, we had very few early Mallard and Canada Goose broods. The first brood of the spring was a Wood Duck family on April 25th. Although the first Mallard and Canada Goose broods were seen shortly after that, there was a lengthy gap until late May before the majority of their broods hatched successfully. When the weather warmed up in early May, there was much better ground cover, so it is likely that many ducks and geese re-nested.

Newly-hatched waterfowl broods were noted on the following dates (with duckling numbers shown):

Mallards– April 26th (6), May 7th (5), May 7th (2), June 3rd (5), June 6th (9), June 14th (8), June 20th (1), June 21st (6), and July 2nd (9).

Wood Ducks– April 25th (11), April 26th (9), April 29th (5), May 5th (15), May 24th (10), May 24th (9), June 10th (10), June 14th (1), June 14th (7), and July 5th (6).

Canada Geese— April 29th (6), April 30th (5), May 24th (6), May 24th (7), May 26th (4), June 3rd (7 released by Wildlife Rescue Association), and June 17th (6 dropped off by same).

Northern Shoveler– May 11th (2). Gadwall-June 14th (8), July 5th (6), July 5th (7).

There may also have been a hatch of a Cinnamon Teal nest, as two older teal ducklings were observed mid-July. Note that many broods, once hatched, may drift into the Alaksen National Wildlife Area through slough systems, so we lose track of them.

We probably need to provide far more guidance to spring and early summer visitors about general bird biology and what constitutes appropriate behavior around nests and birds during the summer months. Some handout materials are now planned, and they may be translated into different languages. A few duck and goose nests along trails were actively investigated by children, and left exposed to predation, and there have been many inappropriate attempts of visitors to interact with the Sandhill Cranes and handle young ducklings and goslings. These issues, along with the flower and berry picking, arise every year at this time.

Monty, our favourite domestic cross Mallard, was one of the ducks likely lost to predators while nesting this spring. She has charmed visitors by loitering near the entrance for the past five years, often "talking" to staff on slow days. and sometimes tapping on the front door on winter days to point out the absence of seed. Every spring, she has disappeared for a month to nest, popping up later to show off her offspring. This April, however, she made a nest near the front door of the house, an area frequented by local mink and raccoons, and she disappeared after a few days. She has not been seen since.



Photo: Kathleen Fry

Monty

Something dramatic always happens every year during the nesting season for the Sandhill Cranes, regardless of intruding geese, and this year was no different. The tension between the resident pair and the gang of 5 non-breeding younger birds was likely at its highest in the third week in April when the two older members of the gang were observed mating and then building a nest in the back meadow of House Pond. Needless to say, the resident male came over and set them straight, evicting the whole gang for a few days. After a few weeks, the idea of nesting seemed to have passed in the younger pair of birds, but there was an uneasy truce for the whole month of May and well into June that kept all five younger birds far away from the nest island.

The resident pair's two eggs were laid on April 9th and 11th and hatched on Mother's Day, May 11th. The first egg hatched first thing in the morning, but the chick fell into the pond after only a few hours roaming around the island. In spite of the attempts of our biologist Dan Dixon to rescue the "colt" (chick), it drowned. Later that day the second egg hatched, and the second colt was carefully guarded by the parent /......continued page 6

(continued from page 5)

birds for the next few weeks. After two weeks, the parent birds began taking the colt on explorations outside the area we had barricaded off so we assumed the young bird was healthy and likely to survive, unlike the colts of 2012 and 2103. Unfortunately, it died suddenly on May 30th, having experienced some sort of trouble in a weed-choked channel north of the nest island. This was a disappointing end to the nesting season for cranes and visitors alike. Here's hoping for a better nesting result next year.

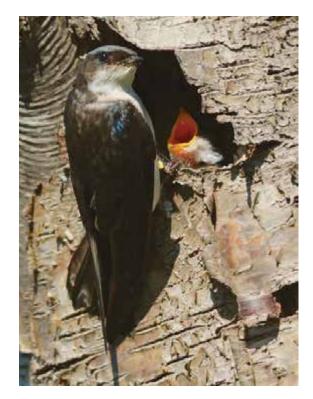
This summer, we put a little more monitoring effort into the Sanctuary's insectivorous birds. Tree Swallows arrived here back in March and by the end of May, over 200 were present and pairs were nesting in most of the nest boxes along Southwest Trail and the West (Seaward) Dyke. Birch trees with natural cavities were also used by these birds, the most visible one being near the tower.

For the Purple Martins, we constructed a new multiple -nest box complex, and installed it on June 11th in the Ewen Slough tidal channel north of our outlet ditch. The complex stands 12 feet high and is designed to give martins an alternative colony site to the aging boxes that have been present on the foreshore since 2000. Last year, Purple Martins nested in one of the old boxes which are north of the tower, and had young present in the nest in late August. This spring, the first



Purple Martin nest complex.

Photo: Kathleen Fry



Tree Swallow nest by the tower. Photo: Ken Young.

Purple Martin arrived on May 7th and the birds were seen perching on the same nest box from May throughout June and into July.

In early May, we started tracking Barn Swallow nest construction and the presence of birds, eggs or nestlings at these nest sites throughout the summer. The results of the monitoring will be reported in the upcoming Marshnotes. The first week in May seemed to be the official start of Barn Swallow nest building, and coincided with a lot of other insectivore nesting. For example, our surveys showed a peak of Marsh Wrens (82 birds) at that time. The Bewick's Wren nesting in our flail mower in the back workshop must have also started at that time, as it was feeding almost fledged young when it shot out of a dark pocket of the machinery May 20th.

The month of June is a quiet period for bird-watchers, a time of year for the annual moult and temporary flightlessness of waterfowl, but also a time when the Sanctuary is at its most colourful. Peas, Vetches, Goldenrod, Daisies, Purple Asters, and Silverweed are just some of the wildflowers in bloom. It is a good time to watch dragonflies, too!

Text: Kathleen Fry, R. P. Bio Sanctuary Manager

"Peyton Pond"

Sometimes, it is easy to imagine that some of our individual summer resident birds are in the middle of a decades-old soap opera such as Peyton Place. A member coined the phrase "Peyton Pond" while watching a puzzling relationship developing between a male Cinnamon Teal and a female Northern Shoveler. For a few weeks in late May, the two birds indulged in daily courtship behaviors while snorkeling through the mud together, and they regularly chased away an interested nearby male Northern Shoveler. The trio argued for weeks, then all three birds disappeared at the end of May. I suspect we will never know how that romance turned out, but note the reference on page 9 to a hybrid teal. Who knew?



The Odd Couple Text and Photo: Kathleen Fry

A Special Thank You



Special thanks to Hudson Robinson for donating money from his 6th Birthday Party to the Sanctuary.

Bird Words

I hope you enjoy these group names for birds.

A creep of nuthatches
A chattering of chickadees
A charm of finches or hummingbirds
An affliction of starlings
A skein of geese (when in flight)
A spring of teal
An aristocracy of waxwings
A company of wigeon
An elegance of terns
A stand of flamingos

Can you find the 8 different bird names hidden in the next few sentences? (One sentence has 2)

- 1 A fresh bouquet of gladiolas was delivered as an acknowledgement of thanks.
- 2 The detective was relentless as he continued with his probing questions.
- 3 The assistant bank teller was all a quiver as the bank robber told her to "Handover the cash".
- 4 Did you know that a "Porbeagle" is also called a "Mackerel Shark"?
- 5 Butternut Squash soup was the only choice on the menu.
- 6 It was with deep regret that the opera singer had to cancel the concert due to laryngitis.
- 7 The fox was always outsmarting the farmer by stealing the free range chickens and not the eggs.

The answers are below.

Text: Varri Raffan Gift Shop Manager

7. Outs<u>marting</u> & s<u>teal</u>ing

6. Regret

5. But<u>tern</u>ut

4."Porb<u>eage</u>l"

3. "Han<u>dove</u>r"

2. p<u>robing</u>

1. ackn<u>owl</u>edgement

as follows:

Answers for hidden birds found in sentences are

Bird Highlights

At the Sanctuary in April you can expect to see a few shorebirds such as Western Sandpipers, Dunlin, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers. These species stop briefly on their migration north to Alaska and the Yukon to breed. Viewing of warbler species and nesting activity is good this month. There were 110 species seen in April 2014.



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Photo: Guy Impey

March 31 – April 5

The lemon yellow American Goldfinch is now back in our area and will be with us over the summer. As in the previous week the American Bittern was spotted in the reeds by the tower eating a garter snake. Photos show it was not an easy meal to control as the snake kept wrapping itself around the Bittern's legs and beak in order to avoid its inevitable end. A total of 64 species were reported for this week.

April 6 – April 12

Three Brant Geese were spotted on April 12th as they flew along the outer seaward dyke. Brant are very much a coastal bird in winter and nest in the Arctic. You tend to see them more often on Vancouver Island especially on the shores of Parksville and Qualicum Beach where they rest and feed on eelgrass. The Brant Festival held in Parksville in March and April celebrates the return of as many as 20,000 Brant geese from Mexico.

This week we had the first returns of Barn Swallows and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Cowbirds are referred to as parasitic nesters, as the female Cowbirds lay their eggs in nests of other songbirds (warblers, sparrows, finches and flycatchers) and let the host birds raise their young. This is not a good thing for the other species, as the baby cowbird is generally

larger and gets more food. Hairy Woodpecker, Lincoln's Sparrow, Hermit Thrush and Orangecrowned Warbler were other birds of note this week.

April 13 – April 19

April 17th a single migrant male Canvasback was seen in Southwest Marsh. On the 18th a Band-tailed Pigeon was seen flying over the Gift Shop, and a Black Swift was spotted over the parking lot. On the 19th, we had the first spring sightings of Mourning Dove, Cliff Swallow, Belted Kingfisher, Wilson's Snipe and Rednaped Sapsucker.

April 20 – April 26

This week we noticed a lot of Golden-crowned Sparrows and White-crowned Sparrows. They are now flocking together in readiness for dispersal across northern forests to nest. The single Mourning Dove is still here and has been seen mostly around the tower. Mourning doves are smaller than Eurasian Collared Doves and have long pointed tails with white and black edges and are missing the black semi-circle at the base of the neck of the Eurasian Collared Doves. On the 22th we had the first spring sighting of a Cinnamon Teal. An American Kestrel and two Purple Martins were seen on the 24th, both first reports for this spring. On the 25th a Barred Owl was seen along the Center Dyke near the bird blind. The first broods of Wood Ducks and Mallards showed up this week.



Wood Duck Ducking

Photo: Samuel McTavish

April 27 – May 3

The species list increased up to 82 this week. Warblers are particularly good this week with 7 different species being observed. We found the first broods of Canada Geese this week. A few first spring migrants included Pectoral Sandpiper, Townsend's Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Wilson's Warbler and Blue-winged Teal. This week you could spot all 3 species of Teal (Cinnamon, Green -winged and Blue-winged) mostly feeding in the

shallow West Field. A Red-breasted Nuthatch was heard along the East Dyke. This species has been missing since mid-summer 2012 when a pair nested along East Dyke. We have never had large numbers of them or know the reason that they haven't been around but we miss seeing them and having them feeding out of our hands like the Black-capped Chickadees do. Other birds of note were Cackling Goose, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Warbling Vireo, Common Goldeneye and American Bittern.

In May, nests of Canada Geese, Wood Ducks and Mallards continue to hatch. The Mallards are off to a slow start this year as a lot of the first nests were destroyed by gulls, crows, raccoons or mink. It is early enough that some will lay another clutch which will push back hatching until end of May and into June. Seven Sandhill Cranes have been present all spring, with the resident pair nesting in the center of the Sanctuary. Activity at the hummingbird feeders is very good this month for both the hummingbirds and their photographers. The total species count for May was 95.

May 4 - May 10

We still have approximately 300-400 Snow Geese with us, although the majority have headed north for Wrangel Island, Russia. A lone Hooded Merganser was seen at the Sanctuary this week. May 4th and 7th the Turkey Vulture was spotted again. On the 5th, a Least Sandpiper was seen out in the West Field. Out in the cattail marshes, lots of loud singing is heard from the male Marsh Wrens as they try to attract Males often make many incomplete nests, most of which merely serve as a focus for courtship. The male will accompany the female as she inspects the nests and choses one to complete and nest in. Over May 10th & 11th we had 6 species of swallows. This week we had the last spring sightings of Darkeved Junco and Double-crested Cormorant. A late small flock of 20 Greater White-fronted Geese were spotted on the 7th. The Barred Owl was located again this time near the portable toilet along the inner trails.

May 11 - May 17

In the morning of the 11th a Green Heron was spotted just west of the south end of East Dyke. It is not every year that we have seen them here. Another uncommon record here is of nesting Northern Shovelers. On May 11th two young Northern Shoveler chicks were seen in West Field. The Sandhill Crane nest hatched on the 11th, with one chick drowning within a few hours, and the second one hatching later the same day and tended very carefully by the parent birds. The last spring

sighting of a Varied Thrush at the Sanctuary was in this week. They tend to move up to higher elevations to nest. A Bullock's Oriole arrived at the Sanctuary on the 14th and Caspian Terns and Cedar Waxwing were reported on the 15th.

May 18 - May 24

A hybrid cross of Blue-wing Teal and Cinnamon Teal was seen on the 18th. This I believe to be the first one of its kind at the Sanctuary although there has been documentation of these hybrids elsewhere. It seems that Mallards aren't the only ones to mix it up. Some other highlights for the week were Black-bellied Plovers, Purple Martins, Swainson's Thrush and the first Olive-sided Flycatcher for the Spring.



Hybrid Teal

Photo: Jim Martin

May 25 – May 31

Shorebird species have dwindled to only a handful of Dowitchers and Yellowlegs. By the middle of July we will have them and other shorebird species returning to our area as they head south to their wintering grounds. It is a short turnaround time for shorebirds. On the 25th a Vaux's Swift was spotted over the outer dyke. In this week we really noticed the Barn Swallows busily building their mud nests. Black-capped Chickadee young have already fledged but will return to the nest for a few days after to roost. They will stay with their parents for approximately 3 weeks then disperse. Our last sighting of a Bufflehead was on the 29th. On the 30th, the Sandhill Crane chick was found dead in a channel near the nest.

By June, we are into the quiet summer time for bird watching. Oddities still appear, though, like the Great Egret of June 2000, a Willet in June 2007 and a Calliope Hummingbird in June 2008, so you never know who will turn up. Total species this month totalled 77.

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(continued from page 9)

This week we are literally down to one each of the Lesser Scaup, Northern Shoveler and Ring-necked Duck. A handful of Northern Pintail and American Wigeon are still about. An Eastern Kingbird was spotted at the north end of West Field. This flycatcher is approximately 8" in size and has a dark gray back, whitish belly with a distinctive white band across the bottom of its tail. It has a small red crown but is hardly ever seen. We had a group of four extra Sandhill Cranes drop by this week, joining our usual 5 non-breeders and our resident pair. Some other species seen this week were Peregrine Falcon, Spotted Sandpiper, Barred Owl and Black-headed Grosbeak.

June 8 – 14

On the 8th the first Gadwall brood was found in Display Field and a single Least Sandpiper at the south end of West Field. On June 8th and 10th a couple of our members were lucky to see a small family of Virginia Rails as they moved between the reeds on the inside of the outer dyke. June 9th one Bullock's Oriole was observed. From June 14th on, we are now seeing 2 fledged juvenile Great Horned Owls which we assume come from a nest somewhere in the adjacent Alaksen National Wildlife Area. They were seen along the inner trails in the northeast corner, and most often in the mornings. Other species highlights for the week were Warbling Vireo, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Black Swift, Turkey Vulture and Swainson's Thrush.

June 15 - 21

Eastern Kingbirds are seen again atop the trees by Fuller Slough and flying over West Field by the tower. Two Mourning Doves were found on the 20th. This week's list had 55 species.

June 22 - 28

On the 28th a Short-billed Dowitcher was found out in the West Field. Telling the Short and Long-billed Dowitchers apart is a challenge, as it is not just a case of one of them having a noticeably shorter bill. The best way to tell them apart is by their calls. The shortbilled Dowitcher has a staccato "tu-tu-tu" while the Long-billed Dowitcher makes a single "keek". Also on the 28th a Violet-green Swallow was spotted flying with 4 other swallow species. Violet-green swallows are the first swallows to arrive in spring and are the first to leave our area, with most of them gone by the end of May for more inland nesting areas.

We now have 2 Eastern Kingbirds here and they are probably nesting in Southwest Marsh. They can be seen sitting together on top of a short sparsely-leaved Pacific Crab-apple tree on an island that runs parallel with the path between the Viewing Platform and the Seaward dyke. They are currently chasing many birds away from the vicinity of the bush, making us believe they have a nest to protect. The last Eastern Kingbird nest that was found at the Sanctuary was back on June 30th, 1997.

Text: Varri Raffan Gift Shop Manager

A Hummingbird Nest



Rufous Hummingbird Nest

Photo: Ken Young

Throughout May, a small ticking noise would have been the only clue that a Rufous Hummingbird was hovering nearby and tending her young in a small cup-shaped nest on a Douglas Fir bough along our Center Dyke. The female was quite skittish if people were around, so the nest went unnoticed for most of the nesting period. The two nestlings fledged only a few days after we had a good look at them on May 20th, but member Ken Young was able to capture this photo a few weeks earlier. The nest likely hatched around May 1st.

Text: Kathleen Fry, R. P. Bio Sanctuary Manager

The Volunteer Corner

Special Thanks To:

- Gatlin Saip, our volunteer student teacher, who took on most of the class bookings from late April to mid-May as part of his UBC practicum.
- Our regular Sunday birding team of Mary Taitt and Brian Self, as well as Jim Martin, Istvan Orosi, Karl Pollak and David Bruce for helping host visitors on weekends
- Bill Topping for hosting visitors in the Museum on Sunday mornings.
- Justin Malkonin, Tom Benmore, Eric Rossici, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed and filling bird feeders.
- Our spring newsletter mailout team of Jim Marsh, Eileen Axford, Eric Rossici, Jean Gartner and Jim Martin.
- The team of Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick for the flower gardens around the Museum and washrooms.

- Our summer trail work party volunteers Tom Benmore, Sue and Peter Jackson, Marilyn Knipp, Rhonda Perrier, and Murray Clark.
- Our Purple Martin nest box installation team of Peter Ward and Ducks Unlimited Canada staff Justin Kwong and summer students Charlotte Adamson and Graham Nicholas.
- Kirstian Sigvardsen and Christelle Mailhe for their donation of a Blue Spruce tree.

Volunteers Wanted For the Fall:

- Hosting visitors along trails on busy weekends, particularly about shorebird, crane and waterfowl migration.
- Specific work parties to tidy up trails before the onset of fall weather.

If you are interested in helping, please leave your contact information at the office or call Kathleen directly at 604-946-6985.

Thanks very much, everyone!

Why be a Member?

As a Member, you receive the following benefits:

FREE admission to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary 365 days a year.

Quarterly issue of the BCWS publication "Marshnotes".

A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop.

Membership in one of British Columbia's most respected conservation organizations.

With your support, the British Columbia Waterfowl Society is able to:

Staff, maintain and expand facilities at the Sanctuary for the benefit of its visitors and members; provide interpretive and education programs, including guided tours for organized groups of all ages; contribute towards important scientific research on waterfowl to determine their life cycle needs for survival; and provide support for like-minded organizations who are working on waterfowl-related projects.

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