Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society

Vol. XLIV #4 July/August 2022

# **Birdathon Report**

**By Jess Morton** 

May Day was a big day for our Audubon chapter, yielding a fabulously successful Birdathon fundraiser in support of chapter activities and programs which brought in more than \$25,000. Many thanks to Jonathan Nakai for organizing it. The principal uses of the money raised will be to support Jazmin Rios's work with young people and several habitat enhancement projects around the peninsula she is developing. Adopta, the Panamanian cloud forest conservation organization we have supported for the last few years, will also receive some critically needed funding.

The pandemic has slowed, but not stopped Jazmin's work for our chapter. You can read her report in this newsletter on page 3, the current installment of her reports that you can find in Hummin' since she became Project Manager. Over the last two years, she has established youth programs in local schools and begun laying the groundwork that will lead to the restoration of Malaga Dune, and, possibly, a nesting place for Snowy Plovers in Hermosa Beach. As the threats posed by the corona virus diminish, these projects will flourish.

Many of you will remember Guido Berguido's presentations to Audubon about his efforts to assemble a cloud forest preserve in a remote part of Panama, and his creation of the non-profit Adopta to oversee its management. The pandemic has made Adopta's work very difficult, both as a direct result of the disease, and because much of Adopta's funding is tourism related. Needless to say, the virus has put a real crimp in Adopta's ability to continue

(see Birdathon continued on Page 5)



F or our July 19th chapter meeting via Zoom, Silvia Gutierrez will present, "How to Nurture Monarch Caterpillars and Butterflies," a slide show and talk that will answer your questions about Monarchs.

Silvia began raising Monarchs six years ago with a single milkweed plant. The caterpillars quickly gobbled up that little plant, and now milkweed has taken over most of her plant space, which used to be dominated by dahlias. She will describe the insect's life cycle from egg to caterpillar to butterfly and review the current California laws governing the raising of caterpillars. (Yes, there are laws!) She will recommend the best flowers to include in your garden for the nectar these butterflies need.

Silvia Gutierrez is a Los Angeles native who remembers the abundance of butterflies from her childhood. She has recently retired from a long school career as the Librarian at Peninsula High School.



This meeting will be on-line live via Zoom. It is also possible that conditions will have changed enough to allow in-person attendance. Check our website to see meeting status.

# From the President Thinking Ahead

By Ann Dalkey

Since the last edition of Hummin', in which I first introduced myself to all of you, I've been diving into all things Audubon. While I was aware that Audubon is a large, well-recognized organization, this immersion revealed to me how all the disparate parts are connected to produce a cohesive effort for supporting birds.

By visiting the Audubon Society's website, I found an account of the organization's history. Founded in 1896, the concept of saving birds from the millinery trade spread rapidly through states, including the addition of California in 1898. From there, the Society grew to become a large, multi-layered organization that is organized nationally, by state, within states, to the level of Chapters. In 1900, Audubon proposed an Annual Christmas Bird Count that continues through today. It advocated for environmental protection laws, including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that continues to protect birds. There is much more to the national organization that you can read about on its website: https:// www.audubon.org/about/ history-audubon-and-waterbird-conservation

Locally, our PV/SB Audubon Chapter participates in the Southern California Council, consisting of 14 chapters (https://ca.audubon.org/about/chapters and https://ca.audubon.org/about/southern-california-council). I have now participated in two of these meetings, by Zoom of course! The most recent So Cal Chapter Council meeting last May included discussion of liability insurance for chapters. You can be pleased to know that our Chapter is well covered by liability insurance for its activities!

Needless to say, I've been impressed with the level of organization and large list of accomplishments that have taken place in the Audubon Society over the past 120 years. But now, it's time for our own chapter to move forward in a way that you will enjoy. That is to meet again in person! I hope you find this as exciting a proposition as I.

To accomplish in-person meetings, we need to be flexible

regarding **COVID-related** safety issues by retaining the ability to hold meetings via Zoom. This means that we will conduct hybrid meetings using both in-person and Zoom meetings concurrently. While the required equipment is rather simple, as with all things technical, some testing will be required. In late June, we will be testing the set-up, including the networking. video and audio settings, and Zoom tie-in. We are hoping to hold an in-person/ Zoom meeting for our July 19 monthly program. Please keep an eve on vour email or our website regarding the status of the July meeting!

Finally, please note that our Chapter is looking for two volunteers to serve on the Board as Treasurer and Webmaster! If you can help with these essential tasks, please contact us at: info@pvsb-audubon.org!



# That Jaz



**By Jazmin Rios** 

Do you remember your days in grade school when you had to conduct a research project

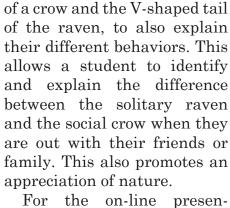
to present at the science fair? This spring I was invited to be a judge for the Esperanza College Prep science fair. The projects, some of them pictured at the right, were very impressive, going far beyond your home baking soda volcano. Many of the students created projects fight climate to change.

Projects varied in

complexity, with some groups creating battery-powered cars while others created sea walls made from styrofoam to protect their cardboard-made village from tsunamis. The award-winning projects were a self-watering greenhouse that retained water and a modular hydroponic farm. The students were very excited to present their work to their

peers and their parents. I got to talk to the students and teachers one on one about some of our research programs and volunteer opportunities.

In addition to science fairs, I continued to build relationships at nearby schools, both virtually and in person. These included continuing work with Rolling Hills Prep, plus adding new schools such as Eucalyptus Elementary School, Esperanza College Prep, and Aspire Centennial College Preparatory Academy. I led bird walks for students at



For the on-line presentations, I tailor my talks to provide a virtual tour of species of wildlife that may be present near school, and explain to students the importance of coexistence.

Although these students must rely on images, they can practice using identification tools such as Cornell's bird Merlin and Wildlife of Los Angeles. Although my visits to some schools are virtual. the students are always invited to my monthly bird walks at Madrona Marsh and with luck spot a Bell's Vireo or even a

group of American White Pelicans flying overhead.

Although we are at the end of the school year I have been planning the summer opportunities at Madrona Marsh. Students will have the ability to conduct their own summer research projects and have multiple opportunities to volunteer in and around their community.



their school campuses, spotting some of the common birds near by. When birding, my goal is to have each student learn at least one bird by the end of the session. For instance, I might explain to them the difference between an American Crow and a Common Raven, going beyond their phenotypic differences, such as the fan-like appearance of the tail feathers

### From the Editor



By Jess Morton

100,000,000 and Counting

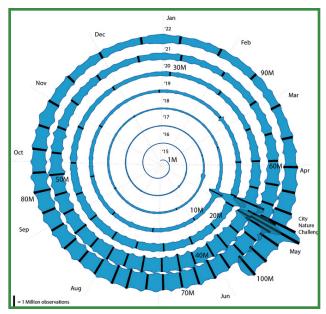
On May 23rd, the citizen science on-line database iNaturalist passed the one hundred million observations mark. Each

observation is the record of some animal, plant or other taxon that someone somewhere in the world has photographed or otherwise recorded and entered to the database, along with date and location of the sighting. Altogether, more than two million people have made entries, accumulating scientifically valuable data about more than a third of a million species.

The iNaturalist project, launched in 2015, is a joint research venture of the California Academy

of Science, which manages the server, and the National Geographic Society. Funding is provided by grants and donors, many of whom contribute on a monthly basis. The database serves as a searchable repository for data on species and higher taxa that can be used by both ordinary citizens for personal projects and scientists working on studies that will be published for conservation and other purposes.

The chart presented here is taken from the iNaturalist website and shows how the dataset has grown, with ever increasing usage as more people find out about it and use it. One of the drivers of increased usage has been the annual City Nature Challenge, run in May of each year. The object has been to have a bioblitz within city limits, recording as many taxa as possible. The first two vears had relatively small participation, being mostly San Francisco challenging Los Angeles to see which could



come up with the most species. LA edged out SF in 2016, when I first began making entries. Since then, cities all over the world have taken part, although it is no longer considered a competition for a rather dubious supremacy. The idea is simply to gather more data, which is now coming in at one hundred thousand entries per day or more!

Data integrity is always a question in ventures like this, especially one in which rank amateurs enter data right along with experienced professional biologists. Each entry is, therefore, ranked as Casual or Research Grade, the latter meaning that some vetting of the entry has been made, either by one of the iNaturalist curators or a consensus of other observers agreeing with the initial identification of the entry. To facilitate labeling of entries, iNaturalist has built into it a photo recognition program that has been trained on a huge dataset of entries. The

> latest model can recognize fifty-five thousand species with a reasonable degree of accuracy—certainly much more accurately than most of the people entering observations, including me.

> A visit to the iNaturalist blog will let you in on what species top the observation list. As a hint, tens of thousands of people who have entered data have done so at a local park or in their yard. You can find iNaturalist.org on line or download its app to your cell phone, from which you can

directly enter photos to the database and add your name to the growing list of citizen scientists taking part. There is also a companion app, Seek, which is worth downloading. It works off a somewhat older dataset, but is truly remarkable in its ability to identify what creature or plant you are aiming the cell phone's camera at. And both apps are a lot of fun to use.



Vincent: Allen, help me! I'm having a hard time telling female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks from female Blackheaded Grosbeaks!

**Allen**: You're not the only one. The grosbeaks themselves have trouble!

Vincent: What's frustrating is the fact that the males are so easy to distinguish. They both look like big, chunky buntings. The male Blackheaded Grosbeak has a black head, back, wings and tail, with big white patches in the wings and tail. The underparts are an odd orange-brown color variously described as rusty, burnt orange, or cinnamon-brown. The male Rose-breasted Grosbeak [Ed. See photo p.9] lacks the odd color; instead, it has a bright red triangular patch in its chest and otherwise



bright white underparts. The females, however, look pretty much the same to me.

similarity The of the females is not surprising, since both species belong to the same genus, Pheucticus (a Greek word meaning "shy"). This genus consists of six closely similar species of the New World belonging to the cardinal family (Cardinalidae). The Yellow Grosbeak of the Sierra Occidental in Mexico and the similar Black-thighed Grosbeak of the mountains of Costa Rica and Panama also belong to this genus, along with two South American species. (Yellow Grosbeaks occasionally wander north to Arizona; one was found near Nogales, Arizona, in early June.) These species are all characterized by the big bill which suggested the common name: "grosbeak" (from French grosbec) simply means "big bill". Big bills are used for cracking tough seeds and beetles.

The breeding range of the Black-headed Grosbeak extends from southern British Columbia south to central Mexico and east to the Great Plains. The male's arrival, singing his robin-like song, is a sure sign that spring has arrived. As Hoffman put it almost a century ago, "the return in April of the Black-headed Grosbeak at once fills great spaces that have been silent with sweet and penetrating melody".

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak breeds in deciduous forest in Canada south to the Appalachians and west to

(Ask Allen continued on Page 10)



(Birdathon continued from Page 1)

the scientific work that has already resulted in many new species being described, including *Dieffenbachia mortoniana*, seen at left. Dozens more species await funding. Funds are also needed to keep forest rangers employed to monitor the property and work with local agencies, farmers, ranchers and loggers to prevent damaging activities within the forest. One had to be let go because of the pandemic.

If you would like to make a donation in support of Adopta to add to the chapter funds we will be forwarding, you can do so by sending a tax deductible contribution made out to PV/South Bay Audubon, with "Adopta" written on the memo line, to:

Audubon, 4034 South Pacific Ave. #3, San Pedro, CA 90731.

## **Owl Times**

By Randy Harwood

I enjoy birding here on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. The South Coast Botanic Garden is one of the hill's many hotspots and has been temporary home to a number of migrants this spring, including warblers, orioles, tanagers and vireos. However, one of the most enjoyable finds for me this spring are year-round residents. A pair of immature Great-horned Owls have been hanging out in a big Pepper Tree just north of the Arizona



Crossing area. I'm looking forward to hearing their hoo-hooing in the evenings when they fully fledge and take flight.

# Portraits: Four birds in their own worlds



# **Labored Take-Off**

By Evi Meyer

I have always been amazed by the amount of energy and work needed for water birds like ducks, geese and pelicans to leave the surface of the water and take off into the air. It looks so laborious and serious as they break out of the water, yet the strange mixture of clumsiness and grace in their movements is also very humorous and fun to watch. I was particularly taken by the determined look of this Hooded Merganser

while he was running on the water. His normally impressive erect head crest was all squished back giving him a slightly less regal look. But hey, if you gotta go, you gotta go, no matter what the visual appearance. The alternative would be way worse.



# **Big Louie**

By Jess Morton

I hadn't counted on meeting Big Louie when I went out on a rather gloomy day to do a little birding at White Point. This was back in the days before the nature center opened there, providing instruction for visitors and a benign feeling for all who passed through.

But there he was, Big Louie in the flesh and with ruffled feathers to boot. And a look that simply exudes malevolence! Gram for gram, I find it hard to believe there is anything more mean-spirited in nature than a hummingbird. Badgers run a distant second.

Now, my ears have never been perfect, but they used to be pretty good. So I clearly understood what this hummer said when an oriole blundered into his flower patch. Big Louie growled--high pitched, but growled nonetheless, "Hey, you. Get youse and that fat beak outta here. Now! You don't, you gonna be guest of honor at my next barbecue. Big time!" (That's the expurgated version, mind you.)

**Love Match**By Paul Blieden

After a day of photographing various birds at San Joaquin Nature Reserve in Irvine, California, I was ready to pack up and drive home. I noticed several photographers closely watching a couple of Avocets. I set up my camera and was blessed with a series of images starting with the two birds rubbing against each other, then proceeding to a very quick coitus, and then this loving image of the two Avocets walking into the sunset and obviously in love!!



# **BIRDS OF THE PENINSULA**

# April – May 2022

by Vincent Lloyd

May saw the discovery of a surprising rarity: the Horned Puffin. Puffins belong to the auk family, the Alcidae. Alcids are marine birds with black upperparts and white underparts, resembling penguins. Like penguins, they dive for fish; unlike penguins, they can fly. Puffins are stocky auks with massive red and yellow bills. The three North American puffins are the Atlantic Puffin, the Tufted Puffin, and the Horned Puffin. Most familiar is the Atlantic Puffin, which breeds on islands off the coast of Maine and the Maritime Provinces.

The Tufted Puffin breeds in the Bering Sea and along the Pacific coast south as far as the Farallon Islands near San Francisco. Occasionally a Tufted Puffin wanders to southern California. Hardest to see is the Horned Puffin, which doesn't breed south of Alaska. It winters far out to sea. As seen in the photograph

here, in winter plumage it lacks the "horns", small black feathers sticking up over the eyes in breeding plumage. It is rarely seen in



southern California waters, and then mostly in late spring.

On May 22, a single Horned Puffin was seen on a boat trip out of Redondo Beach. It was spotted at 270 Bank, also known as Redondo Knoll, a submerged hill about ten miles southwest of Pt. Vicente. (Its shallowest depth is 270 fathoms.) Upwelling water is rich in nutrients, supporting healthy fish and bird populations. A boat trip the following day failed to re-find the Horned Puffin, but came across a **Tufted Puffin** instead!

Another rare alcid, Craveri's Murrelet, was discovered in the same area a few days

later. Craveri's Murrelet, which breeds mainly in the Gulf of California, is closely similar to the local Scripp's Murrelet, but has a thinner bill



and darker wing linings. Another rare seabird, a **Manx Shearwater**, visited the Palos Verdes Escarpment on May 21 (Steven Kuniawidjaja, Ryan Terrill).

Another marine bird, a **Red Phalarope**, unexpectedly sought refuge in the pond at Madrona Marsh on April 13 (Jonathan Nakai). It was the harbinger of a number of sea birds that started appearing far inland. Starting in mid-May, several **Brown Pelicans** were found at widespread locations as far inland as Puddingstone Reservoir, including, in our area, Madrona Marsh and Polliwog Park. The pelicans appear to have been thrown into a crisis by a collapse of fish populations in near-shore waters. The International Bird Rescue facilities in San Pedro have taken in hundreds of stressed pelicans. (Donations to help them continue their essential work can be made at



www.birdrescue.org.) About the same time, five American White Pelicans stopped for a few days at Madrona Marsh. These birds ought to be at their breeding grounds in the Great Basin. Other lost sea birds included a Black Skimmer, found by Nancy Salem, and an Elegant Tern, found by Johnny Ivanov, both at Harbor Park in late May.

A **Masked Booby** appeared at Cabrillo Pier on April 9. A single **Neotropic** 

Cormorant, a species becoming regular in the Los Angeles basin, dropped by Earvin Johnson Park on April 20 (Dick Barth). It is distinguished from Double-crested the Cormorant bv smaller size, shorter bill, and relatively long tail. A Yellowcrowned Night

Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Photo: Janeen Simpson

**Heron** honored Cabrillo Salt Marsh with its presence on May 15.

A family of **Sora** made their home at Madrona Marsh at the end of May. An appar-

ently pure American Oystercatcher was seen by many on the L.A. middle breakon May water single Solitary Α Sandpiper passed through Harbor Park on April 14 (J.I.). Owls Barn were spotted at Malaga Dunes (Brett Karley) and Pioneer Avenue

in Torrance (J.N.). A colony of **Acorn Woodpeckers** continues along the L.A. River at Willow St. (D.B.).

The wandering **Magpie** of San Pedro was spotted again on May 1 (Jess Morton). It is believed to be an escapee. **Phainopeplas** popped up at George F Canyon (Marc Arndt)

and Willow St. (D.B.) at the end of May. Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach has been a hot vagrant trap. The wintering Black-and-White Warbler continued through the middle of April. A rare hybrid Hermit-X-Townsend's Warbler passed through on April 14 (N.S.). Toward the end of May, Lee Pace discovered two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and a Yellow-throated Warbler — the latter a bird of the Southeast, not the Southwest. There was even

an unconfirmed report of a Wrentit at the end of May. A Palm Warbler relaxed at Alondra Park on April 25 (N.S.). Alate Myrtle (Yellowrumped) Warbler was photographed at Madrona Marsh (Will Dunn) on May 14. Yellow-breasted Chats were seen at Madrona Marsh on May 10 and at Golden Shores on May 13 (Mitchell Bailey). Two Yellow-headed

**Blackbirds** visited Madrona Marsh on April 15 (Hans Speckler) and another pair at Harbor Park on May 2 (J.I.).

Cathy and Jim in Rolling Hills had some

unusual visitors at their feeder: a continuing White-throated Sparrow thru April 25, a Green-tailed Towhee on May 7, and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak at the end of May. The latest White-crowned Sparrow was reported by Randy Harwood at Alta Vicente on May 3. Randy had a handsome Indigo Bunting at his feeder on May 12.

**Rufous-crowned Sparrow**s showed up at Pt. Vicente, Pt. Vicente fishing access, and Terranea. **Cactus Wrens** were spotted at Alta Vicente, Filiorum Preserve, and at Terranea.

The author seeks reports from readers about unusual birds you see in our area (the area west of the Los Angeles River and south of I-105.) Send reports to:

stephenvincentlloyd@gmail.com.



(Ask Allen continued from Page 5)

the Great Plains. The two species sometimes hybridize where their ranges meet in the Great Plains. The winter range of the Black-headed Grosbeak is in southern Baja California and mainland Mexico, while the Rose-breasted Grosbeak winters in southern Mexico, Central America, and northern South America. Their wintering ranges overlap in central Mexico.

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are surprisingly common migrants in the spring and fall in the West. This spring, for example, has seen eight of them just in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. Others have been found in Santa Barbara, Big Sur, the San Francisco Peninsula, and even in Crescent City near the Oregon line. Small numbers winter along the coast in most years, when they are, if anything, more common than Black-headed Grosbeaks. On the Palos Verdes Christmas Bird Count, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have been seen five times and Blackheaded four times. The true numbers of the Rose-breasted might well be higher, because the females are so similar; they are probably undercounted.

Allen: No doubt about it, distinguishing the female grosbeaks is a tricky business. Female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, as a rule, are not as buffy overall as female Black-headed, but there is much individual variation. The best field mark is probably the bill: the Rose-breasted's bill is pale pink in color, while the Blackheaded's is dark. Field guides also call attention to the amount of streaking on the underparts: the Rose-breasted is heavily streaked below, the Black-headed lightly streaked (it frequently lacks any streaking at all in the center of the breast). If you spot a suspect grosbeak, the best plan is to photograph it. However, David Sibley cautions that not all individuals can be safely identified in the field.

Another possible identification problem is the first-year males. Males go into their winter plumage (which resembles the female plumage) before fall migration, as early as August. Some male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are lightly streaked on the breast and resemble

Black-headed Grosbeaks. Sibley suggests looking at the wing linings, which are reddish on the Rose-breasted; likewise, there is usually some pink on the breast. Under poor lighting conditions, though, one can be easily fooled.

Vincent: By the way, there are several other birds in California that are called "grosbeaks". The Blue Grosbeak, an occasional visitor in the South Bay, breeds in wetlands in the Central Valley. It is actually a large bunting, a member of the same genus as the Lazuli, Indigo, Painted and Varied Buntings. These birds belong to the cardinal family, like the Rose-breasted and Black-headed Grosbeaks. Two other birds, the Pine Grosbeak and the Evening Grosbeak, belong to the finch family, the Fringillidae. They breed in the Sierra Nevada. Several other "grosbeaks" reside in Central and South America. The Crimson-collared Grosbeak, endemic to northeast Mexico, occasionally

shows up in south Texas. The stunning Slate-colored Grosbeak of Central and South America, with its shiny grey overcoat, white throat and bright red bill, is a saltator, a member of the tanager family (Thraupidae).





Top: Black-headed Grosbeak female *Photo: Jess Morton*Bottom: Rose-breasted Grosbeak female *Photo: Cephas, Wikipedia commons* 

MEET, LEARN, RESTORE, ENJOY

# **Chapter Calendar**

All events are subject to any pandemic restrictions in place.

Bird walks and other in person events are limited to people who have been vaccinated and register to attend.

On-line attendance forms and Zoom links for programs can be found on our website at pvsb-audubon.org

Sunday, July 3, at 8 AM: Bird walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. Meet in the parking lot between Vermont and Anaheim above the ranger station.

Saturday, July 9. The summer Palos Verdes Butterfly Count will survey the South Bay area. Conducted every year since 1981, this is an important gauge of the health of local butterfly populations. To take part, contact Vincent Lloyd at stephenvincentlloyd@gmail.com.

Tuesday, July 19, at 7, for our monthly meeting (still via Zoom), Silvia Gutierrez will present, "How to Nurture Monarch Caterpillars and Butterflies.". See page 1 for program details. Visit our website to see if the meeting will by in-person, via Zoom or a hybrid of both.

Saturday, July 23, at 9. Birding For Kids at Madrona Marsh. Leader: Jazmín Ríos.

Sunday, Aug. 7, at 8 AM: Bird walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. Meet in the parking lot between Vermont and Anaheim above the ranger station.

Saturday, Aug. 27, at 9. Birding For Kids at Madrona Marsh. Leader: Jazmín Ríos.

The Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society and the National Audubon Society, of which PV/SB Audubon is the local chapter, are dedicated to the understanding and preservation of our natural heritage. Within the framework of National Audubon Society policies, we seek and implement ways to preserve indigenous flora and fauna, especially that of our local area, and provide educational services to the region's communities with respect to birds, wildlife, ecology and conservation.

#### **Executive Officers and Staff**

President: Ann Dalkey

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Directors: Paul Blieden, Jonathan Nakai,

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#### **Chapter Support**

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### THIRD TUESDAY PROGRAMS

# 7 PM AT MADRONA MARSH

# 3201 PLAZA DEL AMO, TORRANCE



For our July 19th chapter meeting via Zoom, Silvia Gutierrez will present, "How to Nurture Monarch Caterpillars and Butterflies." She will share with us the best flowers to include in your garden to provide nectar for

the nourishment of these butterflies and review the current California laws governing the raising of caterpillars.

We hope to return to in person meetings in the near future, but, for now, Zoom will have to do.



Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society P.O. Box 2582 Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA 90274

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