



Island Wings

- to enjoy, learn about, & preserve the diverse natural habitats of these islands & beyond

Volume 16 Number 5

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Yoga for Birders

-by Amy Huggins

As a birder, you love how watching and listening to birds deepens your connection to nature. As an SOB (Spouse of Birder), I hear my husband Alan's stories about the feathered details of his latest field trip, but also about his aching neck and back. As a Hatha Yoga teacher, I've developed a program that relieves Alan's back pain, and I've realized numerous parallels *Whimbrel by Jack Dawdy*

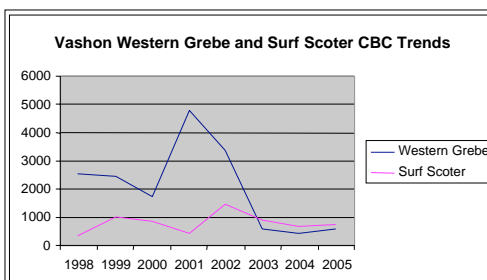


between yoga and birding. Come to the Land Trust on Wednesday, April 12, at 7pm to learn about these links, and how yoga can help you develop physical and mental practices so your birding is more comfortable and focused.

I am a certified Hatha Yoga teacher and have taught yoga in the Blue Heron, Island Yoga Center, and through Family Link at Vashon High School. I currently teach adults and teens at the Vashon Athletic Club. I live with Master Birder Alan, and daughter Leigh on Vashon Island.

The Dwindling of Western Grebes

When Vashon-Maury Island Audubon formed in 1989, Dan Willsie proposed that we adopt for our emblem the Western Grebe. He felt that the huge rafts of these birds that over-wintered in Quartermaster Harbor, up to 3,000, were something remarkable. And the bird is elegant, has a thrilling courtship dance, and moves mysteriously, flying only at night, so that a flock is suddenly just there on the



water some fall morning in the dawn light. Because of the large numbers of Western Grebes, plus the diversity and numbers of other wintering aquatic birds, the

Important Bird Area in 2001. At that time the winter population seemed stable at around 1500 birds.

However, in recent years, the Quartermaster Western Grebe numbers have plummeted, mirroring the decline of this and numerous other wintering aquatic birds in the northwest, especially Surf Scoters. In the summer of 3004, a study by Western Washington University called MESA (Marine Ecosystems Analysis) showed a 77% decline of Western Grebes between 1979 and 2003. Figures from PSAMP (Puget Sound Ambient Monitoring Program) were even worse: 95%. Vashon's Christmas Bird Counts, which include a large area of Kitsap, have hovered between 400 and 600 birds in the last three years, compared to 4781 in '02 and 3347 in '03.

Island Wings will be highlighting some of the studies and expert opinions that can help illuminate reasons for this bleak situation. A key informant, whose attention is constantly trained on the status of all Washington birds, is Tim Cullinan, Director of Science and Bird Conservation for Audubon Washington.

Western Grebes -by Tim Cullinan

The phenomenon of declining aquatic birds is more widespread than previously thought, and it applies to more than just Western Grebes. Scoters, Harlequin Ducks, Red-throated Loons, and some cormorants are also showing declines. There are probably *Western Grebe by Jack Dawdy* multiple causes for many of the declining species.



For Western Grebes in particular, there has been a steep decline over the past three decades, but the magnitude is not known precisely because different monitoring techniques have

been used over time, and it's hard to compare data sets derived from different survey techniques. But everybody agrees that the decline is unmistakable. Western Grebe populations in all regions of Puget Sound are declining. It may be that some of the grebes that formerly wintered in Puget Sound are now wintering further south, such as the mouth of the Columbia River and in Oregon. But Christmas Bird Counts from 1980 to 2000 show that there is a **RANGEWIDE** decline of Western Grebes.

The Western Grebe decline is likely due to a combination of causes. We know that there has been a massive failure of the herring runs in Northern Puget Sound—e.g in the San Juans and around Whidbey, Fidalgo, and Camano Islands. So there is almost certainly higher winter mortality from starvation, or decreased breeding success because the birds that do survive the winter enter the breeding season in poor physical condition. It is also likely that there has been increased mortality from “depredation permits,” i.e. the birds are deliberately shot by operators of commercial net pen fish farming operations. It is hard to determine if there have been declines of Western Grebes on the breeding range, because we know so little about where the grebes that winter in Puget Sound go to nest.

Finally, disturbance is also a likely factor. There is no question that disturbance from humans has increased in the last 20 years. Not only are there more of us, but we keep getting faster, more seaworthy, more maneuverable boats that allow us to reach places that previously were places of refuge for marine birds. Every time a wintering bird is flushed, it has to use energy to get out of harm's way. Every calorie of energy that is burned to retreat from boaters, joggers, off-leash dog walkers, etc. is a calorie that can't be used to maintain body temperature, flee from predators, or store for the reproductive season. Terry Wahl, one of the foremost experts on marine birds in Washington, believes that disturbance is one of the most serious problems for birds in Puget Sound.

Of course, all of these stresses interact. Birds that cannot find food in the traditional herring spawning areas in offshore waters may have to come in closer to shore to forage. There they are more vulnerable to disturbance from recreation. Birds that are already weakened from lack of food are then forced to spend precious energy fleeing from **h u m a n d i s t u r b a n c e**.

Your interest in this issue is timely. The Governor's Puget Sound Action Team has made Puget Sound marine birds one of their highest priorities. Ron Shultz [Director of Programs for PSAT] is trying to find funding for research and monitoring, so we can better understand what is going on and what to do about it. The Western Grebe has been added to the list of “candidate species” by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. That means it is a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered. The next step is to conduct a “status review,” which will describe the current conservation status and threats, and potentially lead to a formal listing. Unfortunately, the Western Grebe is low on the list of priorities, and there is insufficient funding to conduct the status review. A private donor has agreed to contribute some funding to speed up the process, and WDFW has agreed to start right away if another \$12,000 can be found to fully fund the status review. Heath Packard

and I are trying to help them find the money. If this is something your chapter might be able to contribute to, please let us know.

Help Study Shoreline Birds

Bird Survey Volunteers Needed!

Biologists are seeking volunteers to survey birds in shoreline forest habitats around Puget Sound. Volunteer activities include bird surveys, data entry, and/or public education opportunities.

Desired: people with experience identifying songbirds by sight and sound. However, all levels of experience are welcome.

Required: must be interested in learning bird identification skills, be relatively fit, and able to walk through thick underbrush and on uneven (sometimes steep) ground. Must be able to commit to at least three consecutive months during any period of the study (April 2006 – March 2007).

Volunteer training begins in mid-March, 2006. Madrone forests will be included in the Vashon study. To find out more, contact Sherry Hudson:

Pugetsoundbird@gmail.com

Come See the Endangered Maleo! Be a Part of Protecting It!

-by Marcy Summers

The Tompotika Conservation Alliance, a new partnership between Vashon Islanders and the people of the Mount Tompotika area, Sulawesi,

Indonesia, has been working for the last several months on setting up conservation activities for the **rich and imperiled** wildlife of the forests, beaches,



and coral reefs of the Tompotika area. In this remote **Maleo by Sandy Noel** corner of Indonesia, the plants and animals are a strange mix of Asian- and Australian-related

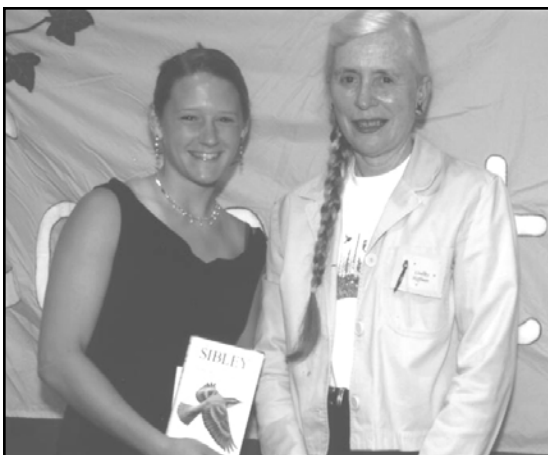
flora and fauna: here we see primates and marsupials in the same forests, woodpeckers and woodswallows in the same tree. The island of Sulawesi, in fact, is home to one of the most unique biotas in the world: about 50% of the vertebrate species found in Sulawesi are found nowhere else on earth. Sulawesi's biodiversity is also deeply in need of conservation attention; a forthcoming article in the journal *Nature* ranks Sulawesi as the single highest priority for conservation action.

This summer, the Tompotika Conservation Alliance is sponsoring an "eco-service" tour to Tompotika to introduce travelers first-hand to the wonders of Tompotika and to help build and shape its newly-begun conservation activities. The trip will be limited to 10 people, and runs July 24-August 7, 2006. Total cost of the two-week trip, including roundtrip airfare, meals, accommodation, and in-country travel will not exceed \$3200 per person. During the two weeks, we'll observe pairs of endangered Maleo birds—a striking black, white, and pink bird slightly larger than a chicken—as they dig huge holes to lay their eggs in a communal nesting ground. We'll make a brief stop in North Sulawesi, and go snorkeling (and diving, if you like) among the world's most diverse coral reefs there and at Tompotika (see www.divenorthsulawesi.com). We'll walk sunny tropical beaches to check for sea turtles, and spend 2 days on a hike to the heart of Mount Tompotika's lowland rainforests, where we'll see hornbills and parrots, tiny primate tarsiers, macaques, giant butterflies, and maybe the Anoa, a rare dwarf forest buffalo, or the possum-like Bear C uscus. We'll assist with scientific surveys of little-known species. And finally, we'll spend some critical time in the villages near Tompotika with interpreters, talking with villagers about their natural heritage and discussing ways that we can help them in their new efforts to preserve it.

The people of Mount Tompotika have asked us to come to help advocate for conservation of their wondrous biodiversity. Be part of the team as we respond! For more information on the trip, please come to an informational meeting Friday, March 3, 7 pm at the Land Trust Bldg, or call Marcy Summers 463-7720 or Rayna Holtz 463-3153.

Audubon Scholarship

The awarding of our annual Vashon Audubon \$500 scholarship is drawing near. The chapter looks for a graduating senior whose plans and interests mesh in some way with our mission (see p. 1 of newsletter). In this photo
Treasurer



Lindsay Hofman congratulates the 2005 winner, Caitlin Bonner.

Volunteer to Frog Find

-by Ann Spiers

The Island amphibian surveyors need additional volunteers to go get muddy. The monitoring occurs during four blocks of time. The hunt is on now until March 1st for Long-toed Salamander eggs and larvae and the first of the Red-legged Frog *Rough-skinned Newt* egg masses. As spring rolls along, the survey looks for



eggs and larvae of Northwestern Salamanders and Pacific Treefrogs. The monitoring ends with the infamous bullfrog breeding June 20 to July 15. Also on the survey list are Ensatina, Rough-skinned Newt, Western Red-backed Salamander, and what would be a newsmaking find, the Western Toad.

In February, biologists Marc Hayes (Washington State) and Scott Snyder (King County) instructed Islanders on amphibian, egg, and larvae identification; breeding habits; and monitoring protocol and safety. Sponsored by the Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust, this year's monitoring covers Fisher, Christensen, Johnson, and Mukai (Island Center) Ponds, and Lost Lake.

To volunteer, contact Land Trust stewardship manager Abel Eckhardt:

abel@vashonlandtrust.org

He will refer you to a trained coordinator for a specific wetland. You will have on-site training in amphibian and egg and larvae ID and instruction in monitoring protocol. Expect four to eight site visits of _ to one-day duration. The Land Trust has the needed equipment and forms. Expect to get your nose wet, your fingers slimy, and your natural world expanded.

Take Care of Christensen Pond

It has become something of a Vashon Audubon tradition to celebrate Earth Day by beating back the exotic weeds that annually invade the woods around Christensen Pond. This year we'll meet at the sign by the chained-off driveway on Wax Orchards Road from 9am to noon. The site is about half a mile south of the Reddings Beach Road intersection. Families with children are welcome, especially for searching out and pulling up the ivy by the roots, and stuffing it

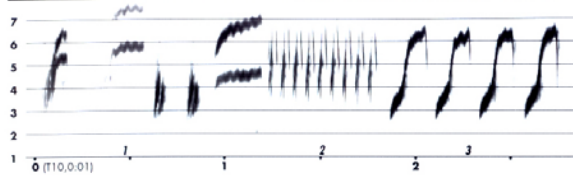
into plastic bags. Please bring your own tools. For further information contact Rayna Holtz, 463-3153.

Tuning the Birder's Ear

-by Rayna Holtz

Instructor Steve Caldwell always brings fresh insights and information to his Birding by Ear classes, and sometimes new equipment and materials. This year it's a groundbreaking new book by Donald Kroodsma, The Singing Life of Birds, published in 2005. In Kroodsma's thirty years and more of studying the details of bird songs, he has discovered that birds of a single species have regional differences in song, and even within areas as small as Vashon there can be multiple dialects distinguishing the songs of birds nesting in one area from those in another. Moreover, Kroodsma has been able scientifically to record the differences through the use of sonograms, which convert the recorded songs into graphs! Revelations from Kroodsma's book will enrich Steve's classes this year.

Figure 6: BEWICK'S WREN—ADULT MALE Song A



Starting with birds that live year round on Vashon, Steve will

Sonogram of

one phrase of a Bewick's Wren song introduce the songs of our birds in a series of four Tuesday evening classes, at 7pm March 21, April 4 and 18, and May 2. There will be Saturday morning field trips on March 25, April 8 and 22, and May 13. The price is \$75, with reductions for "repeat offenders." The lively and somewhat similar songs of Bewick's Wrens and Song Sparrows will be among the early lessons, since they are here right now and will begin singing fairly early. Steve, who notes that, "The B Wren is always hardest to learn," will be able to show his students sonograms of their songs this year. Kroodsma has a special interest in Bewick's Wrens, which is the first species whose songs he studied while still a graduate student at Oregon State University.

BbE II

The **Advanced Birding by Ear class** will have two classroom meetings, May 9 and 23, 7 to 9pm. The Vashon field trip will be Saturday morning, May 20, followed by an overnight campout on Memorial Day weekend in Cle Elum area (May 27-28). This class will review Vashon birdsongs and then concentrate on birds of the east side of the state. The class will cost \$60.

Tokeland Field Trip



The birds and the weather were fantastic on our Tokeland birding trip, lead by Sherry Bottoms and Ed Swan. Eighteen birders stayed in the oldest hotel in Washington State and dined on oysters, salmon, chicken. *Clark's Grebe* by

Jack Dawdy and steak. The next morning, we enjoyed Marbled Godwits, Willets, Whimbrels, and Long-billed Curlews at the Tokeland marina. Unusual sightings included a Clark's Grebe and, at the Raymond airport, a White-tailed Kite.

Sunday a few of us stopped at Brady's Oysters and saw Black Turnstones and a Dunlin sitting on the oyster-shell rubble. We ended the day on the Brady Loop near Elma where we saw Kestrels, a Northern Harrier, and Pintail ducks.

Skagit Field Trip

-by Sherry Bottoms

A stormy, cold, windy day offered 11 birders 33 species of birds. The trip was led by Tim Mann, Chief Naturalist of North Cascades National Park, and Brenda Cunningham, Skagit Land Trust, both members of Skagit Audubon. Highlights included a Western Meadowlark, both species of swans (Tundra and Trumpeter), and thousands of Snow Geese. Brenda informed me that the swans sometimes eat the frozen and re-thawed potatoes out of the fields. We also saw many raptors: Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, eagles and Rough-legged Hawks. We ended the day along March Point where we got to see a heron rookery preserved by Skagit Land Trust.

Birds Go to School

Kathryn True and Sue Trevathan are preparing their annual visit to Chautauqua School to teach all the 4th grade students about water birds. They will make presentations in the classrooms featuring slideshows and mounted birdskins, and then lead field trips to KVI Beach. Volunteers can be very helpful, especially on the field trip, where every student hopes to see his and her chosen bird, and may have difficulty doing so without guidance using a scope or binoculars. If you can make a two-hour commitment, please call Kathryn at 567-5389.

Low Tide Festival

-by Rayna Holtz

As the tide goes out at Point Robinson on the last Saturday morning in May, unveiling a vast expanse of beach sand and cobbles, there'll be tents and buckets and binoculars moving in for a celebratory Low Tide Festival. From 10am to 2pm, beach naturalists will carry on the tradition of the Wally Fox Memorial Beach Walk, introducing families to the communities of crabs, chitons, barnacles, sea cucumbers, sea worms, blennies, limpets, and many other salty shore critters revealed when tide recedes to -2.98 feet at 11:42am. In addition, there'll be Audubon bird walks, nature journaling, a touch

tank, lighthouse tours, beach handouts, food, and a guided walk down the beach to visit a neighbor's shoreline restoration project.

Low Tide Festival plans have been sloshing along since November, pooling the interests and ideas of numerous groups. The state's Department of Natural Resources is eager to celebrate the shoreline of the Maury Aquatic Reserve. The Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust and Vashon-Maury Island Audubon like the idea of teaching about the vital communities of plants and animals that live in the micro-habitats along saltwater shorelines. Vashon Park District and the Keepers of Point Robinson are eager to facilitate public enjoyment of a wonderful park and historic lighthouse. The Washington Scuba Alliance and People for Puget Sound see this as an opportunity to share their knowledge about the marine ecosystem. Karlista Rickerson may show some of her under water videos. Yvonne Kuperberg, the head of the Community Council's Land Use & Natural Resources Committee, is actively helping to plan the day, and Maury Island's Pat Collier is offering to host a visit to her beach restoration project, where King County experts have supervised the replacement of an old bulkhead with native plants that can anchor the soil. The Boy Scouts have agreed to provide a food concession. Darsie Beck will present a nature journaling workshop, and Arlene Fullerton will display her shell collection. Plans also call for having a seaweed expert and a geologist on site.

As new plans develop, descriptions of the event will appear in local newspapers and in posters. Watch for them, and save the date. If you would like to volunteer to bring a display of shells, crabs, seaweeds, or other shoreline life for display at the Audubon booth, please contact Rayna at 463-3153. Please contact the same number if you would like to volunteer to lead birding trips or beach naturalist groups, or take a two-hour shift at the Audubon booth.

Meet the New Board Members

Conservation Chair Michelle Ramsden

Michelle Ramsden, who recently joined the board as Conservation Chair, was schooled at U. of Massachusetts as an arborist in Natural Resource Management. She worked for Massachusetts State government through the university's Entomology Department, studying forest pests such as gypsy moths, brown tail moths, hemlock wooly adelgids, and their parasites. She has lived in the Pacific northwest for three and a half years. Presently she is self-employed on the Island in landscape maintenance, nature landscaping, and as a consulting arborist. She loves the outdoors and conservation is a strong passion of hers.

Island Wings Co-Editor Ann Spiers

Ann Spiers comes to Audubon through serving the Vashon-Maury Island Land as both past board member and its staff as stewardship coordinator. Her experience includes teaching all forms of writing, editing for literary presses, compiling ecological baselines for many Island conservation lands, earning a certificate in Environmental Project Management, and indulging her curiosity about the natural

landscape, particularly on the Washington coast and the Cascade volcanoes.

She recalls Jay Holtz saying, "You won't conserve what you don't love." She responds, "Following the newsletter model of Jay and Rayna, I will work to make the publication a vehicle that will continue to bring its readers to know, then to love, and finally to take the next step--action to conserve wildlife and its habitats."

Island Wings Co-Editor Barbara Chasan

Barbara Chasan is a back yard birdwatcher, educated in liberal arts and the art of nursing. "In one life," she says, "I edited magazines and books. In another, I was a nurse. Years ago Rayna Holtz, who seldom does anything inadvertently, suggested I listen and watch for siskins in my yard. They came, and I continue to listen and watch."

Pond Needs Earth Day Care

It has become something of a Vashon Audubon tradition to celebrate Earth Day by beating back the exotic weeds that annually invade the woods around Christensen Pond. This year we'll meet at the sign by the chained-off driveway on Wax Orchards Road from 9am to noon. The site is about half a mile south of the Reddings Beach Road intersection. Families with children are welcome, especially for searching out and pulling up the ivy by the roots, and stuffing it into plastic bags. Please bring your own tools. For further information contact Rayna Holtz, 463-3153.

www.vashonaudubon.org

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In Memoriam

-by Rayna Holtz

GEORGE STEFFEN

George Steffen, who served as the Vashon-Maury Island Audubon Conservation Chair from August 2003 to November 2005, died of a stroke on January 7, 2006. We salute him for his involvement on our board, and the many other ways he contributed actively to the healthy life of his community. George was both a man of faith and a man of science. A long time high school teacher in Tacoma, a practicing Muslim, a student of Arabic, and an advocate of using science to guide planning and protect quality of life, George modeled an ethical life and urged personal awareness and responsibility in the essays he wrote for *Island Wings*.

It was at this same season in 2004 that he wrote, "Two weeks ago, I looked out my bedroom window and was doubly surprised by what I saw. Outside my window, the camellias were already well along in their budding. That surprised me because it seemed to be rather early (February 1st). Secondly, I was surprised because I was so out of touch with cycles of nature and the chains of life..." He went on to describe a *Scientific American* article about global warming, which has led to disjunctions in the patterns of life on which birds such as the Great Tit, the Pied Flycatcher, and the Adelie Penguin depend. "What struck me both with the camellias and about the article is that all this data springs from daily observations. In my short time as an active birder, I have noticed that birders are always observing. Paul Ehrlich in The Birder's Handbook makes an appeal to birders to pick up a notebook and *write down* our observations," George wrote. "For myself, I have started by noticing the weather. I keep a work diary and every page now has a (growing) list of items that I am watching." He pointed out the relevance of our own personal observations for documenting and understanding the natural world around us, and realizing how it is changing.

George also wrote about the growing threats to water, and about the need to keep our community informed and active at public meetings where key public issues are debated. He devoted one article to documenting the Bush administration's repeated substitution of political criteria for science in their development of policy. "Scientific information which conflicts with administration viewpoints is deleted from Departmental websites...such as at the EPA's report on climate change." He warned that, "Policies based on ideology as a substitute for objective scientific knowledge can easily lead to disastrous misrepresentations of the real world with devastating consequences.

I think of George each morning as I check the progress of buds on the Indian plum. And thinking of his camellias, I write down my findings. To George's wife, Maryam, and his sons Alex, Joseph, Benyamin, and Eli, the Vashon Audubon board expresses sympathy and our shared appreciation for their husband/father. We will miss him and his enthusiasm.

KEVIN LI

Vashon Audubon joins the ranks of the many birders in the Pacific Northwest who mourn the untimely passing of Kevin Li, hero of the Purple Martin recovery, who was only 50 when he died during a scuba diving expedition on January 29. For the past ten years he has been building, mounting, and monitoring Purple Martin nest boxes on pilings over water in the Seattle area. Dennis Paulson notes that, "He had help from many others, but I think Kevin, by his enthusiasm and many hours of hard work, can be single-handedly credited for turning around the decline of that charismatic species." Many Vashon Islanders will remember the talk and slideshow he delivered for us a few years back, with some local input from Rich Siegrist.

Rich recalls that, "My friendship with Kevin began in 1998 when he posted a query on Tweeters wondering who had installed the martin boxes at the Tramp Harbor site. He was collecting clams for the County's shellfish poisoning program and was surprised and pleased that someone had started a martin colony." Many of us wonder whether Kevin's martin boxes will continue to be tended now that he is gone. Rich is optimistic: "I feel that with the infectious enthusiasm that Kevin had for the birds, hopefully someone will take over the maintenance of the gourds and boxes that he had installed in the Seattle area, although not probably with the willingness and love that he had. He was always willing to help with any project no matter how small. Kevin would often e-mail me with fantastic pictures of the martins that he had taken through his spotting scope. I kidded him that he should publish a book of his excellent photographs."

A memorial gathering for Kevin was held on February 3 at the Urban Horticulture Center. Rich reports that donations can be directed to the Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society, Attention: Ms. Charlene Lee, 133-4176A Departure Bay Road, Nanaimo, B.C., Canada, V9T 4V7. GBEARS is co-ordinating the BC Purple Martin Stewardship and Recovery Program, and the BC population of martins has gone from less than ten breeding pairs in the 1980s to over 300 in 2004. Under the GBEARS program, new nest boxes are going up, and all are being monitored and the young banded. Make the check out to GBEARS and include "Kevin Li Memorial Fund" on the check.



Peter Murray photographed this Snowy Owl on the Skagit Flats on January 22.

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