



Newsletter of The Pendleton Bird Club

Kákya Táymut

KUK-yuh TIE-moot, Umatilla Indian Translation: *Bird News*

Volume 8, No. 8 Pendleton, Oregon August, 2010

Surprises on the Albee-Ukiah Bluebird Trail: The Season Ain't Over

Submitted by Jack Simons

As the July "Kakya Taymut" went to press the Albee-Ukiah Bluebird Trail nesting season looked somewhat bleak. Second hatch numbers were down considerably from the 2009 year which left us speculating as to the cause or causes of the decline in nesting. I had hoped to bring you a final tally of this year's nesting results but it appears we'll have to wait until next month's issue because there were still bluebird chicks in nestboxes as of August 15.

Sharon and I toured the trail on Sunday, August 15 and were surprised to find that four nestboxes still had chicks. Three of these boxes had 9 large chicks that were ready to fledge while the fourth box, Number 11, had 4 very small chicks that will need at least two more weeks of munching on insects before they can "fly the coop". Nestbox 11 has been a good box this year: 5 fledglings from the first hatch and (perhaps) 4 more from the second hatch. Three additional boxes that we had been monitoring (boxes 28, 16 and 3) had 10 chicks that fledged since our August 1st visit two weeks before.

I had hoped to give club members a final tally at this time but we're on 'bluebird time'

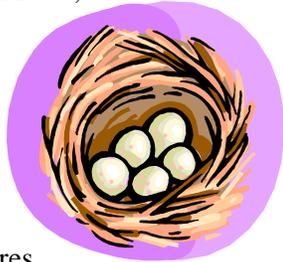


Western Bluebird. Photo by Joy Jaeger.

here so I can only give you a few numbers from the first hatch that compare 2009 to 2010. Surprisingly, first hatch numbers for both 2009 and 2010 were very similar. For instance, in both years every nestbox was occupied by Western Bluebirds (31/31 in 2009 and 32/32 in 2010) for a 100% occupancy rate. In 2009 there were 159 eggs laid compared to 154 in 2010; egg mortality in 2009 was 12% (19/159) while egg mortality in 2010 was only 6% (10/154). More first hatch chicks died in 2010 (25/139 or 18%) than in 2009 (18/129 or 14%). The number of chicks fledged from the first hatch was very similar for both years despite egg and chick mortality: 116 chicks fledged in 2009 and 109 chicks fledged in 2010 for a combined total of 225 fledged chicks for both years.

Second hatch numbers were not complete so we'll have to wait to see how the remaining 13 chicks fared. There is a large insect population at this time so that will be in their favor, but overnight temperatures at that elevation have likely been rather cool the past few weeks. I know that my weather station recorded a low temperature of 37 degrees this morning (Friday, August 20) which is probably the reason I have nothing but green tomatoes in my garden!!!

However, I can share the second hatch nestbox occupancy figures with you. In 2009, 71% (22/31) of the second hatch nestboxes were occupied while only 22% (7/32) of the second hatch nestboxes were occupied during 2010.



We should have all of the figures crunched by the time the September issue rolls around. Meanwhile, stay warm (or should I say 'cool'?) What a weird stretch of weather we've had this year!

KUDOS for KAKYA TAYMUT

From: Mary Jo Higgins
 [mailto:mhiggins40@msn.com]
Sent: Monday, July 26, 2010 12:13 PM
To: styletoil@eoni.com
Subject: Your newsletter

As a charter member of the Grant County Bird Club, I receive your bird club newsletter from Tom Winters. I want to tell you that I think it's an awesome publication and you (and the other contributors) do a fantastic job on it. Thanks so much for sharing it with us. I spend the winters in Arizona and enjoy the fine and fun birding in the areas I visit there, including many of those mentioned in your current newsletter. Maybe I can contact the other Mary Jo there this winter since we do spend the late fall months in Sierra Vista. Anyhow, thanks again for publishing such an enjoyable and informative newsletter. I look forward to it!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Club Meeting

**7:00 p.m., Thursday,
October 14, 2010**

GROUSE OF THE WORLD

**Presented by Mike Gregg &
Jenny Barnett**

**Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton**

Bird Club Meeting

**7:00 p.m., Thursday,
November 11, 2010**

A BIRDING ADVENTURE – SOUTHERN AFRICA

Presented by Terry Steele

**Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton**

Bird Club Meeting

**7:00 p.m., Thursday,
December 9, 2010**

AMAZING HUMMINGBIRDS OF THE UNITED STATES

**A Video Presentation Produced by Charles
W. Melton**

Followed by

THE ANNUAL FUND RAISER

**Pendleton First Christian Church
North Main St., Pendleton**



Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*)

Submitted by June Whitten

To my eyes, the Lewis's Woodpecker is an absolutely gorgeous bird! The very dark green back and tail, appearing almost black, set off with a gray collar and a lovely crimson-red belly and face all add up to make a striking bird. This is a bird of the west, breeding in British Columbia and all of the western states south to Arizona and New Mexico. The favored habitat for this woodpecker is open Ponderosa Pine forest, riparian woodland, and logged or burned forest with standing snags. An important segment of this habitat includes a brushy under story offering ground cover, including dead or downed woody material and abundant insects. Snags are very important for nesting sites, which they excavate, and for perches from which they do a lot of sallying for insects, much like a flycatcher instead of a woodpecker.

Lewis's Woodpecker was, no doubt, well known to many Native American Tribes throughout the western states. Its first identification by non-native Americans came from those intrepid explorers, William Clark and Meriwether Lewis. These two men were well chosen by Thomas Jefferson to lead the "Corps of Discovery" in 1803, a most successful exploration. To me these two men are true heroes. Not only did they find a route from Missouri to the Oregon Coast and back, losing only one man due to appendicitis early in the trip, they left detailed journals of great scientific value. Neither man was a trained scientist, yet they were extremely observant and alert to everything around them. Their very lives and the lives of the whole expedition depended upon this. Their journals reveal a deep interest and understanding of nature. (Even if Lewis did spell "Sioux" 27 different ways!)



Bird of the Month

After traveling for more than a year and a half, the expedition was in the vicinity of present-day Helena, Montana. Lewis wrote in his journal: *"I saw a black woodpecker (or crow) today about the size of the lark woodpecker (yellow-shafted flicker) as black as a crow. I endeavoured to get a shoot at it but could not. It is a distinct species of woodpecker; it has a long tail and flies a good deal like the jay bird."* It really should not surprise us that he thought the woodpecker was black. Without binoculars and probably at some distance, the bird would, indeed, appear black.

However, on the return trip a successful "shoot" was made and Lewis again describes the woodpecker which would later bear his name: *"The black woodpecker which I have frequently mentioned and which is found in most parts of the rocky Mountains as well as the Western and S.W. mountains, I had never an opportunity of examining until a few days since when we killed and preserved several of them. This bird is about the size of the lark woodpecker or the turtle dove, tho' it's wings are longer than either of those birds. The beak is black, one inch long, rather wide at the base,*

"I saw a black woodpecker (or crow) today about the size of the lark woodpecker (yellow-shafted flicker) as black as a crow. I endeavoured to get a shoot at it but could not. It is a distinct species of woodpecker; it has a long tail and flies a good deal like the jay bird."

Meriwether Lewis

somewhat curved and sharply pointed, the chaps are of equal length. Around the base of the beak including the eye and a small part of the throat is of a fine crimson red." In spite of their daily responsibilities and exhausting trek, both Lewis and Clark managed to keep accurate and complete notes in their journals giving us an insight into the birds, animals, and plants they identified.

Both male and female Lewis's Woodpeckers excavate the nest cavity, usually in dead or decaying trees, often in burned trees, and line the nest with wood chips. Nests are often reused the next year.

Usually 6 or 7 opaque white eggs are laid and incubated for 12 to 16 days. The female usually takes daytime duty and the male incubates at night. The young fledge between 28 to 34 days, but remain near

the nest site for about 10 days begging the adults to bring them food, which consists mostly of insects. The adult call is a series of short, harsh “chr” notes. The drum is short, weak, and at a medium speed followed by several individual taps.

The Lewis’s Woodpecker is of high conservation importance, because of its rather small and patchy distribution. The estimated decline of this species since 1966 is as much as 50 percent. The final cause or causes of the decline is unknown, but lack of snags



Lewis’s Woodpecker. Photo by Dave Herr.

left standing in logged or burned areas appears to be a factor. The increase of European Starlings in their nesting area may be a big reason for their decline, as the starlings take over the already excavated nest sites.

One of the best areas in Umatilla County to see Lewis’s Woodpeckers is the Tower Burn, which is reached by taking Soap Hill Road (which becomes USFS Road 52) south from Ukiah. After approximately 12 miles, take USFS Road 55 (aka Texas Bar Road) down through the burn area to the John Day River and out to Hwy 395, if desired. This road is not snow-plowed, so a good time to look for Lewis’s Woodpecker is after the snow has melted in May or early June. Check out blackened snags for their nests.

Some of the information for this article was from: Bird Watcher’s Digest; Vol. 32 No 5, May/June 2010; “Clark’s Crow Lewis’s Woodpecker;” William B. Hughes; and <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/bfl/speciesaccts/lewwoo.html>



Bird Words

Recommended by Andrew Clark

Nidifugous \nye-DIFF-yuh-gus\

Meaning: leaving the nest soon after hatching

Example Sentence:

"Little is known about the mortality of nidifugous shorebird chicks." (Hans Schekkerman, et al., *Journal of Ornithology*, January 2009)

Did you know?

"Nidifugous" hatched from the Latin words "nidus," meaning "nest," and "fugere," meaning "to flee." Its contrasting word "nidicolous," meaning "reared for a time in a nest," combines "nidus" with the English combining form "-colous" ("living or growing in or on"). Another relevant term is "precocial." A precocial bird is capable of a high degree of independent activity as soon as it emerges from the egg. While all nidifugous birds are also necessarily precocial, some nidicolous birds are also precocial — that is, they are capable of leaving the nest soon after hatching, but instead they stick around. Other nidicolous birds are "altricial," which is to say they are hatched in a very immature and helpless condition and require care for some time.

Source: Merriam Webster’s Word of the Day, Merriam Webster Online....Unabridged

Editor’s note: Dave Herr told me that California Quail are **nidifugous** birds and he was right. There was one day that I didn’t check the nest with the 13 eggs reported in the last newsletter and the following day all I found were shells and the family had vacated. Last week there was a quail family with a bunch of teen-age quail, hopefully that was them!

B. Clark



Birding the Pacific Northwest: Baker County, Oregon

Submitted by Barbara Clark

Baker County advertises that it is a fine place for watching birds, and that it is!! Like Umatilla County, birds hang around all year with a parade of different species as the seasons pass.

During my two-week stay just out of Halfway at the end of July / beginning of August, I was delighted by Cedar Waxwings flying playfully after each other

over the pond in front of the cabin, Rufous Hummingbirds menacing any Black-chinned Hummers that attempted to come to the feeder on the

porch, and a young Red-tailed Hawk flying each day after its mother over the meadow continuously calling to her in the Red-tailed language, that piercing, descending *Kee-eerrrrrr* !

On my walks at the edge of the meadow along the creek and forest were Black-capped Chickadees, Lazuli Buntings, Gray Catbirds, Western Wood-Pewees, California Quail with young, Chipping Sparrows, Mourning Doves, Song Sparrows, a Red-Naped Sapsucker, and more!

Baker County's local birders recommend several special sites for good bird viewing:

- **Ponds east of Interstate 84:** Best Frontage Road (access is Exit 302) attract birds, as do ponds on the west side of the freeway. You might see swans, geese, ducks, cormorants, gulls, grebes or loons, especially at sunrise.
- **Highway 86:** Sage thrashers around the Virtue Flat area (about five miles east of Baker City), and on down the canyon toward Richland might yield glimpses of orioles, yellow-breasted chats and warblers.
- **Highway 7:** Along the Powder River toward Sumpter, and around the ponds are warblers, kinglets, chickadees, nuthatches, bluebirds, and waterfowl.



Birding Oregon



- **Valleys, including Baker, Keating, and Bowen:** Sparrows, hawks, prairie falcons, harriers, golden and bald eagles (wintertime, mostly).

For a complete list of Baker County Birds, visit www.fs.fed.us/r6/w-w/recreation/Bird-viewing/Bird-viewing.shtml

Information about Baker County Birding is from the "Baker County Visitors Guide" produced by the Baker City Herald.

July - August Bird Sightings

Compiled by Aaron Skirvin

This is the season when shorebird migration normally kicks into high gear. Although McKay Reservoir has dropped enough to attract some shorebirds, the water level in Cold Springs Reservoir, which is the premier shorebirding site, remains too high to provide the mudflats needed by migrating sandpipers and plovers. The nesting season for most bird species is winding down, and we received many reports of young birds this past month. If you're looking to hone your sparrow ID skills, now is a good time to drive Mud Springs Canyon Road or Gurdane Road, where you can see dozens if not hundreds of sparrows of several species. And, to make the experience even more challenging you will find adult and juvenile birds in the mix. Want to find a Mountain Quail in Umatilla County? August is the best time to look for these elusive and rare birds along the North Fork John Day River in extreme southern Umatilla County.



Bird Sightings

On the evening of July 18, Craig Kvern saw 3 adult **Gray Partridges** with about 18 chicks along Adams Road near its intersection with Thornhollow Road. The next day, I (Aaron Skirvin) spotted a group of 9 **Turkey Vultures** slowly soaring westerly over the Umatilla River near Jack Simons' house, about 3 miles east of Pendleton. In prior years, Jack had noted a congregation of Turkey Vultures hanging around the river in his neighborhood for several days in late July to late August. The vultures were

feasting on deer carcasses, which had succumbed to blue tongue disease. So far this summer, with no dead animals to feed on, the vultures have not lingered in the area.



Turkey Vulture. Photo by Aaron Skirvin.

I spotted a flock of 14 **American White Pelicans** flying over Mission Ponds on July 19. A few evenings prior, Jack Simons reported counting over **78 American White Pelicans** in 3 groups flying westerly over his house, which is only a quarter mile from Mission Ponds.

While walking his dogs on July 20, Jack Simons found 4 fledgling **Western Wood-Pewees** along the Umatilla River near his home. Jack also noted a pair of vocalizing **Eastern Kingbirds** but hadn't seen any young kingbirds. The day before, a **Cedar Waxwing**, carrying a twig in its beak (a sure sign of nest-building), flew by Jack's house. A male **Bullock's Oriole** stopped by to inspect the hummingbird feeder in Gerry Rowan's yard near McKay Creek Elementary School in SW Pendleton on July 21.

Jack saw more fledged flycatchers in his neighborhood on July 23: a family of 5 **Western Kingbirds** and a family of 6 **Eastern Kingbirds**. On the 25th, Jack reported seeing more young birds near his home, including a family of **Western Wood-Pewees** and a family of **House Wrens**. Marveling at the number of baby birds he'd seen around his home, Jack commented, "I don't think I have ever seen as many young birds that have hatched in the river bottom as this year."



Joy and Steve Jaeger installed nine bird nest boxes on their property on Cabbage Hill. While checking the boxes on July 23, the Jaegers found nestling **Tree** and **Violet-green Swallows** nearly ready to fledge and a new **Western Bluebird** nest in their boxes. Joy further reported that on July 28 all of the boxes had evidence of nesting birds, including a couple of boxes that **House Wrens** had filled with twigs.

Neal Hinds had a good morning of birding at Cold Springs NWR on July 24, when he found 30 species of birds. His highlight of the morning was spotting a group of three **Great Egrets** perched in a snag at Memorial Marsh. It turns out that July is the month that we are least likely to see Great Egret in Umatilla County. Even during winter, two or three Great Egrets can be found in the Stanfield area, where at least one can often be seen wading in Stage Gulch Creek in the middle of town. It was only recently that Great Egret was first reported here in July, when Neal found one at Cold Springs NWR on July 1, 2008. It's probably just a matter of time before Great Egret becomes a new, confirmed breeding species in Umatilla County.

Driving by Pendleton Community Park on July 25, I noticed several gulls on the lawn in the park, and one of the gulls looked larger than the others. I stopped to take a closer look and confirmed an adult **California Gull** in the group of **Ring-billed Gulls**. While Ring-billed Gulls are common in town, it's noteworthy to find a California Gull in Pendleton.

By July 28, Jack Simons was beginning to have second thoughts about extending the "welcome mat" to the remarkable number of kingbirds around his



Eastern Kingbirds. Photo by Bob Tapley.

home. Jack reported, "I walked out onto our deck and happened to look over at the raspberry bushes where I saw an **Eastern Kingbird** sitting on a high branch.

I figured it was just waiting for a bug to wander by and ‘sure enough’ it dove into the raspberries and came out a few seconds later where it sat on the same branch. What was in its mouth? A juicy red raspberry which it managed to swallow! I didn’t know king-birds ate berries but they apparently do.”

By the end of July, two **Osprey** juveniles fledged from the power-pole nest at the east end of Pendleton. This is the notorious nest that the Ospreys rebuilt with innovative and recycled building materials this spring (see the April 2010 newsletter in the newsletter archives library on the club’s website at www.pendletonbirders.org).

The rarest bird reported this month and the entire year, so far, was a **WHITE-WINGED DOVE** observed by Neal Hinds at Cold Springs NWR on July 31. Neal saw several **Mourning Doves** perching on a snag and heard an unfamiliar call coming from



White-winged Dove. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

the group. Surveying the group of doves through his binoculars, he discovered the White-winged Dove. After Neal observed the dove for a few minutes and while he was checking his field guide, all of the doves flew from their perches and disappeared. The normal geographic range of this species is the extreme southern US (Arizona to Florida) and south. Neal’s reported sighting is only the second record of White-winged Dove in Umatilla County; the first record was of one dove at Barbara and Andrew Clark’s feeder near McKay Dam on June 11, 2007.

Joy Jaeger reported that Townsend’s Solitaires had at least one successful nesting in the

vicinity of their mountain property, which is located a few miles from Albee. Over the weekend of July 31/August 1, Joy saw and photographed two “polka-dotted,” juvenile **Townsend’s Solitaires** as they foraged around the Jaeger’s cabin.

Every year, a few **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** spend the summer in Jack Simon’s neighborhood and visit the feeders in his yard. This year is no exception, and he has several Black-chins around his yard. However, on August 3, Jack noticed a different hummingbird at his feeders. Initially, he thought it might be a female Anna’s, but upon further observation he decided it was a female **Rufous Hummingbird**. Two days later, the female **Rufous Hummingbird** was still at Jack’s feeders, trying to assert its dominance over the **Black-chinned Hummingbirds**. It harassed the other hummers and chased “a bedraggled female B.-chinned into the ground where she took refuge in a foundation vent” of Jack’s house.

Continuing to keep track of the shorebirds at Cold Springs NWR, Neal Hinds added **Solitary Sandpiper** to the Umatilla County year bird list when he photographed two at Memorial Marsh on August 7. Other birds that Neal noted at Memorial Marsh included **Western Sandpipers** and a **Black-crowned Night-Heron**.

The bird-interaction dramas continued in Jack Simons’ yard through early August. This time, Jack saw at least 10 **American Robins**, mostly immature birds, fighting over the bird bath. Thus, we can conclude that not only did the flycatchers have a good nesting season, so did the robins in Jack’s neighborhood. On August 9, Jack noted that at least 8 hummingbirds were using his feeder, but he had no further reports of egregious assaults. Also on August 9, June and Duane Whitten had a male **Rufous Hummingbird** join the summer-resident **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** at the feeders in their SW Pendleton yard.

Apparently, some **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were dispersing/migrating by August 10, as I had one in my yard in SE Pendleton, which is poor habitat for nuthatches. About 6:30 on the evening of August 12, Connie Betts noticed three **Common Nighthawks** flying/foraging over her neighborhood in SW Pendleton, but by 7:30 pm, the number increased to at least 10 nighthawks.



Lynn Tompkins and her interns at the Blue Mountain Wildlife Center reported finding an adult **Bald Eagle**, an **Osprey**, and seven **Turkey Vultures** at Langdon Lake on August 13. A report of a Bald Eagle during the summer months in Umatilla County is a rare event, but in the past two or three years a few have been reported. With the remarkable increase in Bald Eagle numbers in the Pacific Northwest and nationwide over the past decade, we're hopeful that in the near future the Bald Eagle will once again be listed as a breeding species in Umatilla County.

In our area, the fall shorebird migration extends from late June through October and into early November. Cold Springs Reservoir and McKay Reservoir are the best shorebirding spots.

Because of the wet spring weather that lasted well into June this year, McKay Reservoir and Cold Springs Reservoir were still too full of water in July to provide shorebird habitat (mudflats). By mid-August, the water level in McKay Reservoir had dropped enough to expose some mud at the upper (south) end. Neal Hinds reports that Cold Springs Reservoir is even further behind schedule this year and won't begin to show mudflats until late August.

Taking advantage of the lowering water levels in McKay Reservoir, June Whitten and I birded the upper end of McKay Reservoir on the morning of August 15. We found a few dozen shorebirds, with most of them foraging within 25 to 100 feet from us. In all, there were 11 species: **Western** (30), **Least** (4 or 5),

Semipalmated (at least 4), **Baird's** (3), **Solitary** (1), and **Spotted Sandpipers** (2); both **Yellowlegs** (1 each); **Long-billed Dowitcher** (3); **Semipalmated Plover** (1); and **Killdeer** (10 or so). We also had good views of a juvenile and an adult **Forster's Tern** and one adult **Common Tern**.



Grasshopper Sparrow. Photo by Mike Danzenbaker.

After birding at McKay Reservoir on the 15th, June and I headed to Pilot Rock, Vinson and Gurdane. In mid- to late August, the grassland habitat along the Gurdane Road can be heavy with sparrows. Along

the highway between Pilot Rock and Vinson we saw a few noteworthy birds: one **Sage Thrasher**, a pair of **Gray Partridges**, one **Loggerhead Shrike**, and one **Barn Owl**. Vesper Sparrows can be especially abundant along the 24-mile Gurdane Road, and we decided to count them, starting at Vinson and ending at Hwy 395 about 17 miles south of Pilot Rock. Our total count was about **180 Vesper Sparrows**, an impressive number, but a few years ago and a little later in August we tallied over 300 birds. In addition to the ubiquitous Vesper Sparrows, we found one adult **Brewer's Sparrow**, one juvenile

Grasshopper Sparrow, another **Loggerhead Shrike**, two family groups of **Gray Partridges**, and one **Gray Flycatcher** along Webb Slough (1/4 mile from Hwy 395).

On August 16, Jack Simons spotted a **Barn Owl** hiding in a brushy thicket along the Umatilla River near his home. This is the first Barn Owl he has seen in his area in several years.



Evening Grosbeak. Photo by Aaron Skirvin.

When I stepped out the door to head for work about 7 a.m. on August 18, I heard an **Evening Grosbeak** calling from some tall trees about a block away. This is the first time I've observed an Evening Grosbeak in Pendleton in the summer. We are more likely to find a few migrating grosbeaks in town in April/May and again in October, but in recent years

the grosbeaks have been less reliable in the spring.

Fall migration is underway and that means many species will be leaving (Long-billed Curlews and most Cliff Swallows have already vacated Umatilla County); some will be arriving for the fall/winter

(look for the first White-crowned Sparrows about September 1); and some will be passing through (warblers and shorebirds). Fall migration is a great time to look for birds, so spend some time birding and send all your sightings to Dave Herr at dsherr1@mac.com or 541-276-6413.

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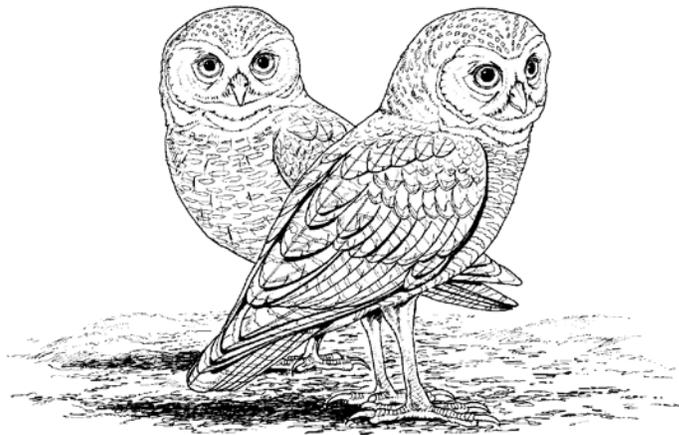
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