



The Magpiper

March, 2010

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March Calendar

March 11

Board meeting
7:00 p.m.
219 Newell Street

March 18

Membership meeting
7:30 p.m.
Whitman College

March 20

Field Trip—Spring Begins
8:00 a.m.

Field Trip Information

Trips depart from Harper Joy Theatre parking lot on Whitman College Campus

Bring plenty of food and water

Plan to carpool whenever possible and reimburse for gas

Contact trip leader if you plan to attend

Changes, cancellations and trip results will be posted at <http://www.blumtn.org>

Have questions? Contact Ginger Shoemaker at 525-2963 or housewren@blumtn.org

Meetings

Membership Meeting: March 18—7:30 p.m.

Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College

PROGRAM: STATUS AND CONSERVATION OF THE COMMON LOON IN WASHINGTON STATE

There is something magical about the sound of a loon calling in the wilderness. If you have spent any time during the summer months in the Okanagan Highlands, you probably have had the privilege of hearing their eerie yodel. However, it's a sound that isn't often heard any more on our woodland lakes.

Daniel Poleschook Jr. and Virginia Gumm are common loon conservationists and wildlife photographers from Loon Lake, Washington. They have been working together to prevent further common loon breeding-range contraction in the Pacific Northwest. Poleschook and Gumm have been conducting loon research in Washington State since 1996 and have captured, measured and banded common loons in Washington and California since 2000. Their work has been published in a variety of publications and they have presented their findings to numerous groups and agencies. In the past loons were more widespread in our state than they are today, but because of a variety of reasons, which our speakers will address, their numbers have significantly diminished. Join us to learn what is being done to help protect common loons and their habitat.



Field Trips

SPRING BEGINS

Saturday, March 20—8:00 a.m.

The first day of spring is a great day to join Mike and MerryLynn Denny as they survey the county for birds. There should be a nice variety of gulls on the Columbia River, and the Dennys will help us hone our identification skills for these under-appreciated birds. Other species that could be seen are long-billed curlew, white-throated swift, Say's phoebe, Savannah sparrow, swallows, raptors, waterfowl and more. It will be a full day of birding with two expert birders so you won't want to miss this trip. Bring a lunch and a scope if you have one. Plan to carpool. Call the Dennys if you want to join the fun. 529-0080.



President's Corner

HOLDEN WAS RIGHT

By BMAS President, Tom Scribner

J. D. Salinger is dead. I know, you wonder what his death has to do with birds. This being the monthly newsletter of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society and all. Other than Holden Caulfield, Mr. Salinger's most famous literary creation, wanting to know where the ducks go in winter, the fact that J. D. Salinger is dead is unrelated to birds. But stay with me here. That Mr. Salinger is dead, at least indirectly, is very much related to the National Audubon Society, and in a way that young Holden Caulfield would find perversely ironic.

Holden, you will recall, was very bothered by the rampant dishonesty of his elders. They were not always truthful. They were not genuine. They intentionally sought to mislead. So it is, at least in one particular instance, with the National Audubon Society. At least, that is, the advertising arm thereof.

I cite as proof of my accusation the September-October 2009 issue of Audubon magazine. If you have already recycled that issue, or do not even subscribe, preferring instead to be a member only of BMAS, let me introduce into evidence, as exhibit one in support of my slanderous charge, the two-page ad that appeared therein, right after you opened the front cover. It was an advertisement for New Hampshire, the state, and with the exception of a series of very small generic pictures of a loon, and a moose, and some deer, that sort of stuff, fauna and flora that are reputed to call New Hampshire home, it showed, stretching over both pages, a very long covered bridge, a wide placid river, and a very green, inviting mountain. The ad text, in relevant part, said: "With views like this, sometimes it's hard to know where to look first. Lakes and mountains, beaches and forests - - here in New Hampshire, we've got 'em all. Once you start looking, there's no telling what you'll see." With respect to the two-page bridge/river/mountain photo, the idea, I assume, was that what you were looking at - - the bridge, the river, and the mountain - - were in New Hampshire. I mean, it was, was it not, an advertisement for New Hampshire? They are certainly not going to try to get you to come to their state by showing a picture of the Grand Canyon or the Golden Gate Bridge. What would be the point?

Now, since you are beginning to wonder what J. D. Salinger really had to do with all of this, let me explain. Mr. Salinger lived in Cornish, New Hampshire, which is right across the Connecticut River from Windsor,

Vermont. Windsor and Cornish are connected by a very long covered bridge over the Connecticut River, the Windsor-Cornish Bridge, the very bridge shown in the above-referenced ad for New Hampshire in the September-October 2009 issue of Audubon. For all I know, the picture might have been taken by old J. D. himself from his front porch.

But here's the thing. The mountain in the picture is Mt. Ascutney. (Locally known as Ascutney Ascutney, an Indian name meaning land of many mountains). Okay, this is an in-joke that only people in Walla Walla - - or incarcerated at Sing Sing - - could really appreciate.) And Mt. Ascutney is in Vermont! I know this because I used to live in Ascutney, Vermont, at the base of Mt. Ascutney, when I went to high school in Windsor, Vermont. I have been across the Windsor-Cornish Bridge many times - - on foot, by bike, and in a car. So you can imagine my surprise when I saw the above-mentioned advertisement for New Hampshire prominently showing a bridge, half of which is in Vermont, a river, ditto, and a mountain that has no attachment to New Hampshire whatsoever.

Holden Caulfield, created by J. D. Salinger, who lived in Cornish, New Hampshire, would have found all of this Madison Avenue sleight-of-hand absolute proof of what drove him to the Big Apple and his flight from the artificiality of adult society. How can you justify trying to lure people to New Hampshire by showing them a lovely picture of Vermont? Which, when you think about it, may be what drove poor J. D. over the edge. When the ad appeared, he was still alive, living in Cornish, New Hampshire. According to an article that appeared in the New York Times after his death, he was often seen in Windsor, Vermont, shopping at the local supermarket or lunching at the Windsor Diner. To get to these places he had to cross the Windsor-Cornish Bridge, from the windows of which, looking south and west, he could see Mt. Ascutney - - in Vermont.

Yes, J. D. Salinger is dead. But what drove Holden Caulfield to become the Catcher In The Rye lives on - - in New Hampshire and the pages of Audubon. Next month, now that the statute of limitations has run, I will tell you how I once started a forest fire on Mt. Ascutney. Holden would have understood. J. D. was probably upset that I ruined his view.

Spotlight on Nature

BROOD PARASITISM

From *The Birders Handbook*

Some species of birds thrive not by carefully rearing their own young, but by pawning that task off on adults of other species. The **brown-headed cowbird** and the **bronzed cowbird** are the only recorded North American brood parasites which must parasitize and cannot build nests of their own. The brown headed cowbird has been recorded as a parasite of more than 200 other species. Cowbird eggs do not necessarily closely mimic host eggs, nor do the young oust host eggs and young from the nest. But cowbirds do tend to hatch earlier than their hosts, to grow faster, and to crowd out or at least reduce the food intake of the host's young.

Although the nests of many species are acceptable places for cowbirds to deposit eggs, all of those species are not necessarily appropriate hosts. Many parasitized species routinely recognize and reject eggs (by either destroying the egg, rebuilding the nest to cover the egg, or abandoning the nest), while many others are simply inadequate as foster parents and never successfully rear cowbird chicks.

Cowbirds thus can place powerful selection pressure on a host bird species to learn to recognize and reject cowbird eggs. Species are divided into “**acceptor species**” and “**rejector species**”. The song sparrow is an acceptor species. It has eggs very similar in size and spotting pattern to those of the cowbird, and almost invariably raises the cowbird young. In contrast, catbirds and robins are both rejector species. They lay unmarked blue eggs and almost invariably eject cowbird eggs from their nest.

Recent student show that only about 3% of cowbird eggs and nestling reach adulthood. However, they have a long reproductive period with an extraordinarily short interval between clutches. An average female lays about 80 eggs, 40 per year for two years. About 35 of those 80 eggs end up as adults which is an average of 2.4 adults per female. Clearly, such numbers more than compensate for the excessive loss of eggs and young in the nests of inappropriate hosts. In contrast, many of the passerines that are parasitized by cowbirds have seen a decline in successful reproduction causing concern and conservation efforts. The most notable is the work being done on the conservation of the Kirkland's warbler. Cowbird “control” has been implemented in Michigan, where the warbler nests. Efforts are also being made to preserve it's nesting and wintering habitat.

Bird of the Month

SONG SPARROW *Melospiza melodia*



Size: 6.25 inches

Description: Stocky, coarsely brown streaked sparrow with a stout bill, center breast spot, lateral throat stripe and a long tail.

Common in woodland edges, weedy fields with brush nearby, gardens,

yards, pond edges and streams lined with brushy cover.

Song sparrows forage on the ground and in shrubs. They mainly eat insects and seeds and are a common visitor to winter feeding stations. They respond readily to “phishing” so are quite easy to find in the field.

Their song is a very crisp, clear precise sound, making them easily distinguishable by human ears. They typically learn their songs from a handful of other song sparrows that have neighboring territories, so are most likely to learn songs that are shared in common between these neighbors. Ultimately they will choose a territory close to or replacing the birds that they have learned from. This allows the song sparrows to address their neighbors with songs shared in common with those neighbors. It has been demonstrated that they are able to distinguish neighbors from strangers on the basis of song, and also that females are able to distinguish (and prefer) their mate's songs from those of other neighboring birds. Other birds that can mimic songs are not able to effectively imitate the song sparrow's song.

A song sparrow's nest is built beneath a grass tuft, in a shrub or a brush pile. There usually are two clutches, and the second clutch is often higher up in the brush once the leaves have provided enough cover. The mating system is mostly monogamous and some pairs stay together in successive years. Residents stay on or near territory all year. A clutch is 3-4 eggs and is incubated by the female for 12-14 days. Both sexes feed the young, who leave the nest after 9-12 days. After they fledge, the male often takes charge of the fledglings so the female can begin a new clutch. Song sparrow nests are often parasitized by the brown-headed cowbird. However, in spite of this their populations continue to be stable. Common predators of song sparrows are cats, hawks and owls. They recognize predators by both instinctual and learned patterns—fear of owls and hawks is instinctual, but fear of cats is learned.

Conservation

THE ATLAS OF GLOBAL CONSERVATION

From Nature Conservancy Magazine Spring 2010

Pick up a traditional atlas and you'll find ample information on political boundaries and common landforms such as mountains and deserts. National capitals are easy enough to find. But try to locate the salt marsh capital of the world? Find the epicenters of bird diversity? Identify the largest intact grasslands? For the purposes on conservation, the atlas holds few answers.

Until now. On Earth Day 2010, the Nature Conservancy and University of California Press will publish *The Atlas of Global Conservation*, bringing together for the first time such information as where animal populations are concentrated, which species are in imminent danger of extinction, where forests are disappearing most rapidly and where nature is thriving. Readers can take measure of their own place in the world, not only by longitude and latitude but also by the types of habitats surrounding them, by the species that flourish at home but not elsewhere, and by the amount of conservation that has been done—or could be done.

The book includes more than 100 full-color maps and charts, as well as essays by leading conservation thinkers that put the information in its larger context. The atlas breaks critical new ground in global mapping as well, for the first time delineating specific freshwater and marine systems such as salt marshes and kelp forests. It also includes first-ever maps of where high concentrations of freshwater birds, seabirds and marine mammals occur. And although the atlas documents widespread destruction on natural areas, it also highlights where the diversity of life continues to thrive.

To create the atlas, a team of Conservancy scientists asked researchers and conservationists around the globe to share their information. The response was overwhelmingly generous. Individuals and institutions offered up entire databases—in some cases, the results of a life's work. In other instances, the team became scientific sleuths, tracking down answers to fill the gaps of our knowledge in areas of the world where data was less accessible.

The atlas offers readers a chance to assess the natural world without the filter of someone else's opinion about what is or is not important. You can see and judge the facts for yourself. For more information check it out at <http://www.nature.org/tncscience/maps/>

ENVIRONMENTAL SCORECARD

From Washington Conservation Voters 2/22/10

Washington Conservation Voters and the National League of Conservation Voters released the 2009 National Environmental Scorecard today revealing scores for the Washington State delegation. The National Environmental Scorecard has been the nationally accepted yardstick used to rate members of Congress on environmental, public health and energy issues. We can be proud of our state's delegation. With but two glaring exceptions, they have stood up for the environment. The 2009 Scorecard includes 11 Senate and 13 House votes that are dominated by clean energy and climate but also encompass other environmental issues such as public lands, water and wildlife conservation.

Senate Scores: Patty Murray -100; Maria Cantwell-100

House Scores: Jay Inslee - 100; Rick Larsen - 100; Brian Baird - 86; Doc Hastings - 0; Cathy McMorris Rodgers - 0; Norm Dicks - 100; Jim McDermitt - 93; Dave Reichert - 64; Adam Smith - 100

RAPTORS AND LEAD POISONING

At our February BMAS Board meeting, the board agreed to donate \$500 to Blue Mountain Wildlife in Pendleton. The money will be used to help a grant proposal that Director, Lynn Tompkins of the center is working on to fund a lead research and education project. Lynn has realized that the only way she is going to be able to stop treating eagles for lead toxicity is to get rid of the lead. Initially, the plan is to purchase a field test machine that will test all eagles and buteos admitted to the center. Many of the eagles that are brought to the center have been shot, or have ingested lead from waterfowl that have been shot. Educating the public on the dangers of lead will be a long-term goal.

The penalties for shooting a raptor will hopefully soon become more severe. In December of 2009 the House of Representatives passed HR 2062, the Migratory Treaty and Enforcement Act of 2009 which will allow courts to impose more severe penalties on individuals convicted of "aggravated" (an act that is indifferent to the pain and suffering of birds) injuring or killing of protected bird species. The bill is now headed to the U.S. Senate where passage is hoped for in early 2010. If passed, this legislation would elevate "aggravated" injuring or killing of protected birds to Class A misdemeanors, punishable by up to a year in jail. Second offenses would be treated as felonies punishable by up to two years in jail.

Miscellaneous

MARCH ARRIVALS

It's time to start looking for avian migrants that return to our valley in the spring. February brought the return of a few - Say's phoebe, western bluebird and killdeer. We should start seeing for more species soon. MerryLynn Denny has compiled dates for expected arrivals which can be found on our website www.blumtn.org on the Local Birding Info link. Here are some of the birds to look for in March:

March 1-15

Mountain bluebird
Lincoln's sparrow
Sandhill crane (flyover)
Caspian tern
Long-billed curlew
Violet-green swallow
Tree swallow
Savannah sparrow

March 26-31

Turkey vulture
American avocet
Black-necked stilt
White-throated swift
Loggerhead shrike
Red-naped sapsucker
Northern rough-winged swallow
Cliff swallow
Vesper sparrow
Fox sparrow

DOUBLE FEATURE MOVIE FUN NIGHT

Sponsored by Lower Columbia Basin Audubon

Hummingbirds and Warblers will be highlighted in a presentation at Battelle Auditorium on March 6 starting at 7:30 p.m.

First Flight is the story of Honey, a black-chinned hummingbird, chronicling her nest from eggs to the first flight of her young.

Watching Warblers West covers all of the 24 warblers that are found in the west—the ones that can be seen when they migrate through our area as well as the unique ones found in Texas and Arizona.

Here's a chance to enjoy the movies and also meet members of Lower Columbia Basin Audubon. Tickets are \$3 for children under 17, \$5 for adults, or \$15 for family

Books

In Patagonia by Bruce Chatwin

Chatwin's account of his journey across Patagonia (a vast area of southern Chile and Argentina) in the 1970's is embellished with all the qualities of a good English romantic story. His tale begins with a memory from his childhood about a piece of skin that was in the possession of his grandmother. He learned the skin belonged to a Mylodon, an ancient giant sloth which is native to Patagonia, and this inspired his desire to visit this remote part of South America.

When he arrived in Patagonia, his journey took him all over modern Patagonia, bouncing from town to town in search of old legends and odd tales. He investigated the haunts of the last know days of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, visited the beaches that Darwin visited during his famous voyage aboard the Beagle, and even visited the famous Mylodon cave where the archaic animal's remains were discovered.

Chatwin tells a remarkable tale and brings a nice mingling of history, myth, travel and local flavor all into one narrative. He is a great storyteller and sometimes it is hard to separate fact from fiction; but in a work such as this it is not especially important. He conveys the magic and mystery of the land and gives us a glimpse of what Patagonia means to generations of seekers and travelers.

Wild Moments: Adventures with Animals of the North

Edited by Michael Englehard

We'd all like to spend more time in wild places, not simply as a respite from the routines of daily life but because there is much to be learned from these places and the creatures inhabiting them. *Wild Moments* offers a fascinating range of creative nonfiction essays that describe personal human-animal interactions in a realistic way. These imaginative accounts speak to the ability of nature to transform the human experience. The writers take you across an emotional landscape marked by wonder and terror, humor and grief that is as varied as the wildernesses where the essays take place. The encounters recalled in the essays cover a wide variety of subjects, from a meditation on the disappearance of beluga whales to an account of an inquisitive ground squirrel in a remote cabin.

Wild Moments presents some of the best and most innovative nonfiction writing in an environmental context, and will be of interest to all readers with a passion and concern for the natural world.

In the Field

MerryLynn saw about 60 **bohemian waxwings** fly over her house on January 28.....being chased by a **sharp-shinned hawk**.

On February 2, Mary Campbell reported seeing five **wood ducks** on a pond on Yellow Hawk Creek near her home. She also said there was an **American dipper** that had been making regular appearances along the creek.

Jon Lundak birded Rooks Park on February 2 and saw a pair of **great horned owls**. One was on a nest in the heron rookery to the north of the park. He also saw several **hooded mergansers** on the creek.

Nat Drumheller hiked up Mormon Grade on February 3. He saw a **golden eagle** and heard a drumming **pileated woodpecker**.

On February 6, Jim and Sue Parrish drove northwest of Walla Walla and found some interesting birds— a **Say's phoebe** (first sighting of the spring), **horned larks**, a **prairie falcon**, **Eurasian collared doves** and a **ferruginous hawk**.

Mike and MerryLynn led a WOS Field Trip on February 6 along the Columbia and Snake Rivers, mostly in Walla Walla County looking for owls. The group saw six **barn owls**, six **great horned owls**, four **long-eared owls** and a **northern saw-whet owl**. They also saw 10 **gray-crowned rosy finches**, one **American tree sparrow** a **golden eagle**, two **merlins**, numerous **bald eagles** and many other species.

On February 9, we saw two **northern shrikes** on our Bennington Lake walk. One of them was very agitated, either with the other shrike or with a **kestrel** that was nearby. The **killdeer** have returned to the lake - there were three of them today. We saw one **great horned owl**, a **sharp-shinned hawk**, a male **northern harrier** and one **red-tailed hawk**. There were 31 **common mergansers** on the lake, two **mallards** and two **canada geese**. The **Bewick's wrens** were singing, and there were **downy woodpeckers**, **juncos**, **robins**, **Townsend's solitaires**, **song sparrows**, **white-crowned sparrows** and **black-capped chickadees** along the trail. One **ring-billed gull** circled the lake while a **great blue heron** kept watch from the top of the dam. All in all, a pretty typical February day at the lake.

Paul Rossi reported a large mixed flock of **cedar and bohemian waxwings** near the BMAC building on January 11

Beth Campbell wrote to tell me about 18 **juncos** and 20 fat **California quail** on February 12 in her yard in Dayton. She said she has been feeding the juncos all winter and loves having them in her yard.

Pam Fisher walked Mill Creek/Rooks Park on February 12. On the creek were **mallards**, **common and hooded mergansers**, and an **American dipper**. There were **Bewick's wrens**, **song sparrows**, **robins** and **finches** in the park as well as three **kestrels**. Five **great blue herons** were perched in the trees at the rookery.

Mike and MerryLynn birded the west side of the county on February 13. They watched a flying flock of about 400 **snow geese** (including one blue phase) at Casey Pond. They finally landed along Burbank Slough. They also saw an **Eurasian wigeon** on Casey Pond, a **glaucous gull** on the poop piles and two **gray partridges** on Hatch Grade.

Earl Blackaby participated in the GBBC on February 13. Some very interesting birds visited his yard including a **northern goshawk** and four **Cassin's finches**.

The Dennys and the Shoemakes conducted our February raptor survey on Valentines Day. It rained all day, but we still saw some great birds including this cooperative



merlin that posed for us on an irrigation wheel along Stateline Road. We saw a total of three **merlins** during the day. Our total raptor count for the day was 230, including nine **great horned owls**. Six of those were on nests. Most of the 154 **red-**

tailed hawks we saw were also near nests. We saw two **Harlan's red-tailed hawks** and one **Krider's red-tailed hawk**. Noteworthy non-raptor species seen were a **Say's phoebe**, a **Savannah sparrow** and a **northern shrike**.

On February 15, Jon Lundak noticed that the **great horned owl** is back in the hole in the cliff at the parking lot at Bennington Lake where it nested last year.

On February 17, Pam Fisher encountered an adult **bald eagle** while walking in the fog along Mill Creek. It certainly got the attention of four **common mergansers** that were on the creek. The eagle flew along the creek

and then flew back into a tree near the Project Office. While she was watching the eagle, a vocally distraught **American kestrel** flew back and forth between some nearby treetops.

Waterfowl Fieldtrip: Sixteen eager birders, led by George Jameson, left foggy Walla Walla Saturday morning January 20, and drove over to the Columbia River to look for waterfowl. Fortunately, the fog had lifted by the time we got to the river. We saw **white-fronted geese**, **canada geese**, **cackling geese**, **tundra swans**, **trumpeter swans** and seventeen species of **ducks**. One **common loon** was spotted out in the river at Wallula grain terminal and several **American white pelicans** circled above at McNary NWR Headquarters. We saw about 20 **bald eagles** along the river.



Group at Two Rivers HMU

On our return to Walla Walla we drove Byrnes Road and watched a beautiful **ferruginous hawk** flying above us, a **Cooper's hawk** hunting the roadside, a singing **Say's phoebe**, two **rough-legged hawks**, a **great horned owl** on a nest, and numerous **red-tailed hawks**, **northern harriers** and **American kestrels**. A nice ending to a beautiful sunny day in western Walla Walla County.

Mike and MerryLynn watched a **peregrine falcon** harassing the ducks at Casey Pond on February 20.

Ron and Carole Louderback saw 33 **black-crowned night herons** on the north side of Casey Pond on February 21.

Jon Lundak took this photo on February 21 of the **American dippers** on Mill Creek near Rooks Park. He also noted that both the **great horned owls** and the **great blue herons** are staking out territory at the rookery in Rooks Park.



There are a good number of **bald eagles** on the Columbia and Snake rivers right now. Earlier there seemed to be more immature birds, but lately there have been a good number of adult birds, including this one that MerryLynn Denny photographed at Port Kelley on January 20.



Rodger and I saw five **western bluebirds** on Jasper Mountain road on February 28. Spring is coming!

It's exciting to see the spring birds returning to our yards and our valley. Don't forget to let me know what you are seeing. Call me at [525-2963](tel:525-2963), or email me at housewren@blumtn.org.

Ginger

OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL

March 26-28, 2010

The 13th annual Sandhill Crane Festival in Othello is coming up the end of March. There are crane tours, specialty tours, lectures, etc. Go to their website for more information www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org

Board of Directors

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BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON SOCIETY
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Mission Statement:

Blue Mountain Audubon Society (BMAS) was organized in 1971 and chartered by National Audubon Society in 1972. The Chapter's objectives are to serve its membership and the larger communities of Southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon with the goals to appreciate, preserve and enjoy birds, wildlife, and the natural environment of the area. Education is a primary objective of Chapter activities. Through volunteer efforts BMAS provides educational opportunities, conservation activities and enjoyment of wildlife and wildlife habitat opportunities to members and to the public. The Chapter meets the third Thursday, (September through May) at 7:30 in Gaiser Auditorium, Whitman College Science Building. A newsletter, **The Magpiper** is published September through May and is free to members. Non-member subscription fees are \$20 annually. BMAS is a non-profit 501c(3) organization. Find us on the internet at <http://www.blumtn.org>

Join Blue Mountain Audubon Society – Complete the following information and mail along with a check in the amount of \$20 for your first year's membership to: Blue Mountain Audubon Society, PO Box 1106, Walla Walla, WA 99362

Name: _____

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