

VSO Newsletter

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Editor Dixie Sommers

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Send submissions by email. Attach text as a MS Word document or plain text. Submissions may be edited for style and/or length. Send the largest photo image files possible.

You can contact VSO President Dan Bieker at: danbieker@gmail.com

One Good Tern...

By Dan Bieker, VSO President

Springtime is indeed a special time of year for birding enthusiasts. *Migrant anticipation* could be medically classified as a "seasonal disorder", but arguably one with many health benefits. There's nothing like hearing a Blue-headed Vireo singing from a leafless treetop in March or catching sight of a Louisiana Waterthrush bobbing along ice-covered rocks in a mountain stream to ignite spring fever.

As we welcome spring with all its associated wildlife activity, we also welcome good news from our governor concerning the plight of nesting seabirds on the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel south island. The tunnel expansion project underway has wiped out nesting habitat on the island for thousands of breeding terns and gulls. Little concern for the fate of these birds was evident until a massive public outcry prompted officials to act. Measures are being taken to provide temporary nesting habitat for this season, with plans for creation of a more permanent replacement island in the future.

When it comes to the environment good news is hard to come by, but this is a positive development that can be directly attributed to the intervention of concerned citizens and organizations including the American Bird Conservancy and the VSO. Thanks to all of you who made your voices heard.

As migrant anticipation takes hold this spring, don't forget about upcoming VSO activities. The annual meeting in Williamsburg promises to be fun and engaging with diverse field trips and an opportunity to socialize with birders from across the state. And PLEASE DO continue to participate in VSO's Breeding Bird Atlas. This is the last year of data collection and many gaps still exist. Our VABBA2 coordinator, Ashley Peele, will be offering workshops this spring and hosting some exciting block busting events this summer in southern and southwestern regions of the state. More details about VABBA2, the annual meeting and the HRBT seabird colony can be found in this newsletter.

As an outlet and gathering place for folks passionate about the natural world, the VSO depends on volunteers - from board members to field trip leaders to the financial contributions of our members. Thanks to all for your continuing support, and we hope to see you in Williamsburg!

Governor Northam Announces Migratory Bird Protections

By Terri Cuthriell

Many of you read the February 14, 2020, <u>press release</u> announcing Governor Northham's plans to protect migratory birds. The Governor and Secretary of Natural Resources, Matt Strickler, are to be commended for taking this first step to protect the seabirds of Virginia.

A chief point in the announcement is the encouraging news that the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will initiate a regulation to define and permit "incidental take" of birds, nests, and eggs for major commercial, industrial, and construction projects in the Commonwealth. This will make Virginia a leader, with California, by ensuring that state law provides the same migratory bird protections as were ensured by the historic federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. DGIF will release a draft of the new regulation for comment by the end of March.

Caught in the gap between federal and state protection are 25,000 of Virginia's terns and gulls, making Northam's announcement that Virginia would do the right thing by providing nesting habitat for these birds a pivotal choice. We hope Virginia's example will be followed by other states planning large infrastructure projects that could cause incidental take of birds.

The announcement is late coming, as the colony will return in a few weeks to the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel South Island for the 2020 breeding season. But it seems that the Governor is finally providing the leadership necessary to coordinate actions by several state agencies.

Crews will begin work immediately to prepare Rip Rap Island, a tiny artificial island adjacent to the terns' 38-year nesting ground. Terns require an open beach-like area, so work will include removing vegetation, controlling active predators (rats), sealing old buildings, and spreading sand on the island to create attractive habitat.

This plan is by no means ideal, explained Dr. James Fraser, a Virginia Tech scientist who has studied the colony. In addition to the rats, Rip Rap Island is much smaller than South Island and barges will be needed as additional habitat. To accommodate all the birds, up to 59 barges (100'

x 30') may be required. We don't really know how the birds will respond to the new habitat, Fraser said.

Creation of a new island habitat is probably the best long-term scenario for the seabird colony, especially for the Royal and Sandwich Terns that nest in Hampton Roads. Island creation will likely be necessary in the future if we are to protect these fragile species. Almost all of Virginia's Royal Terns and all of our Sandwich Terns nest on South Island.

In a similar situation in North Carolina, Royal and Sandwich Terns have abandoned naturally formed historic nesting areas, probably due to development, mammalian predation and sea level rise. In recent years, these two species in North Carolina have nested solely on dredge spoils islands.

To provide long-term nesting habitat, DGIF will accelerate its work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study the feasibility of creating an artificial island. But the new island for the Hampton Roads colony is not a done deal yet. VDOT has stated that it won't be built as part of the HRBT Expansion Project. How an island creation project would be funded (\$10 million) is not yet established. And any new project requires extensive evaluation and permitting. The island would be created using plentiful dredge spoils, but under the best circumstances, the island may not be ready for the nesting colony when it returns in 2021.

So there is plenty of work left to do. The HRBT Seabird Team will continue our engagement with the community and all involved state and federal agencies until we have accomplished the best solution possible for the Hampton Roads seabird colony. We invite you to join us by continuing to write letters and by attending Board meetings to ensure that Virginia's seabirds are protected and receive the permanent home they deserve.

For information please contact me at SaveBirdsHRBT@gmail.com

Plan Now to Attend the 2020 VSO Annual Meeting! Williamsburg, Virginia, May 1 – 3, 2020

The strength of spring birding in the greater Williamsburg area has been well-documented through the annual Spring Bird Counts conducted by the Williamsburg Bird Club. That one-day endeavor, typically held on or near the first Sunday in May, has averaged 153 species throughout its more than 40-year history.

From fresh and saltwater rivers and marshes to mature forests and farmland, the Colonial Historic Triangle offers a broad array of habitats to explore, most within a few minutes of the Annual Meeting headquarters. Tack on access to even greater species diversity with three days of field trip possibilities and it's easy to see why being at this event is a birding must.

Williamsburg is a family friendly

destination! While you're birding the local hotspots, your family can enjoy popular nearby destinations like Busch Gardens, Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, Yorktown and unique shopping venues like Merchant's Square and Premium Outlets. See www.visitwilliamsburg.com for Williamsburg area tourist information.

Headquarters will be the Fort Magruder Hotel and Conference Center, 6945 Pocahontas Trail,

Williamsburg, VA. This is a Wyndham Hotel nestled in a lush garden setting with complimentary WIFI and parking, 24-hour fitness center, and heated pool. See www.fortmagruderhotel.com for more information about the hotel and its amenities.

VSO Room rates are \$119 plus tax for a single or double. This special rate is also available for two nights before and after the meeting. Reserve by calling (757) 220-2250 or go to www.Wyndhamhotels.com. Enter Fort Magruder Hotel into the destination field, Select your arrival and departure dates, Click on the Special Rates tab and select Group Code, then Enter the Virginia Society of Ornithology Group code: 050120WIL, Click done, then search and finish your reservation.

If you prefer to camp, Chickahominy Riverfront Park and Newport News Park are each about 20 minutes from the Fort Magruder Hotel.

The keynote speaker at Saturday evening's banquet is Dr. Bryan D. Watts. His topic is: "Tracking Whimbrels: Exploring the secret life and shifting challenges of a migrant shorebird." Dr. Watts has studied birds since early childhood. His research projects focus on solving conservation problems

primarily within the mid-Atlantic region. He has published more than 250 publications on avian ecology and conservation. He is the Mitchell A. Byrd Professor of Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary and Director of the Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary/VCU.

Field trips are planned to all of the area's best birding spots on Friday afternoon and Saturday and Sunday mornings. Want to see a Red-cockaded Woodpecker? Then you should go on the Piney Grove field trip on Saturday morning. How about Swainson's Warbler? Then the Dismal Swamp trips on Saturday or Sunday are for you. Field trips are planned to more than a dozen other great places with outstanding trip leaders, habitat and birds. See www.virginiabirds.org for a link to a detailed field trip schedule that includes trip descriptions, habitat, target species, available restroom facilities, walking surfaces, etc. For the first time at a VSO Annual Meeting, you will sign.up for field trips when you register for the meeting.

Raffle Prizes – Raffle tickets will be available when you register <u>and</u> at the meeting. Tickets are \$5 for one ticket or \$20 for five tickets. Raffle prizes include a pair of Zeiss Terra ED 8x42 binoculars, one-night stay at the Fort Magruder Hotel, complete bluebird box set up including pole and baffle, two tickets to the



Williamsburg Bird Club's 2021 Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel birding boat trip plus dozens more. Raffle drawings will be held Saturday evening during the cocktail hour. You must be present to win.

Dr. Bryan Watts, Photo courtesy of Center for Conservation Biology

More on the 2020 VSO Annual Meeting...

There will be a *special raffle drawing Friday evening* during the cocktail reception for a field trip departing at 7 am Sunday morning. This will be a unique opportunity for 10 lucky birders to travel with local William and Mary bird whisperer Dr. Dan Cristol to some of his favorite spots on the historic and beautiful campus of the College of William and Mary. Dan will chauffeur you in a William and Mary van as well as walk you along some of William and Mary's best birding paths. With his keen eyes and ears, expect the unexpected.

Annual Meeting Costs Only the Registration Fee is required, but all other optional fees must be paid when you register:

• Registration fee: \$45

• Breakfast Buffet Saturday and Sunday (includes tax & gratuity): \$13.50 per day

• Banquet ticket: \$35

• Discover the James River Boat Trips Saturday: \$60 (this is the only field trip with a fee)

 Raffle tickets: you can purchase with registration in advance plus you can purchase more tickets on site at the meeting. Bring cash or checks please. \$5 for one or \$20 for five tickets

Paying Registration Fees by Check If you prefer to pay by check, use the <u>paper registration form</u>. Complete it and mail with your check to the address on the form by April 15.

You do not have to be a VSO member to register and attend the annual meeting, so encourage your friends to join you for a wonderful weekend of birding.

Registration deadline is April 15, 2020. You can get more details at the online registration page accessed from the VSO web site: www.virginiabirds.org



THE WEEKEND SCHEDULE

Friday, May 1, 2020

1 pm Registration desk opens and vendors start set-up 1:15 - 1:30 pm Friday field trips depart

5 - 6 pm Cocktail reception with light hors d'oeuvres, cash bar and special Raffle Prize Drawing

6 pm VSO Business Meeting (followed by dinner on your own)

Saturday, May 2, 2020

4:15 - 8:30 am Saturday field trips depart

5:30 am - Free coffee outside meeting rooms

5:30 am – Skedaddle Coffee Shop in hotel opens for light breakfast items (breakfast sandwiches, bagels, muffins, juice, etc.)

6 – 8:30 am Breakfast Buffet served (must purchase ticket when you register)

11 am Registration Desk re-opens and vendor/exhibit area opens

2 – 4 pm Paper Sessions

5:30 – 7 pm Cocktail hour with cash bar and Raffle Prize Drawings

7 pm Banquet with program/keynote speaker (must purchase banquet ticket when you register)

Sunday, May 3, 2020

5:30 am – Free coffee outside meeting rooms

5:30 am – Skedaddle Coffee Shop in hotel opens for light breakfast items (breakfast sandwiches, bagels, muffins, juice, etc.)

6 - 8:30 am Sunday field trips depart

6 – 8:30 am Breakfast Buffet served (must purchase ticket when you register)

11 am Hotel Checkout and Meeting Ends

A theme of this annual meeting is "Reduce, reuse, recycle." We're working with the hotel to reduce single-use plastics and we're asking meeting attendees to help us.

- Bring your own tote bag. We're NOT providing bags at registration.
- Bring your own water bottle. We'll have water on field trips to fill your bottles.
- We're reducing paper handouts (<u>not</u> eliminating) and encourage folks to accept registration materials by email in advance. Print out and bring only what you need. Or save the PDFs to your phone or tablet.

Prothonotary Warbler, Photo by Inge Curtis

Call for Presentations VSO 2020 Annual Meeting

The Virginia Society of Ornithology invites scientific presentations for its 2020 Annual Meeting to be held May 1-3 at the Fort Magruder Inn and Conference Center in Williamsburg, VA.

Topics on a broad range of ornithological interest will be considered. Oral presentations should be no more than 15 minutes long, including time for questions. Static displays (such as posters) will also be accepted, space permitting. Submissions will be reviewed by a selection committee and added to the program until the schedule or display space is full.

Presentations will be given between 2 and 4PM on Saturday, May 2. Applicants will be notified of their acceptance (and time slot) by April 8, 2020. Note: the \$45 weekend registration fee will be waived for successful applicants.

Please submit the following information about your poster or presentation no later than March 28, 2020:

- Title of oral presentation or poster
- Presenter's name
- Email address
- Phone number
- Institutional affiliation (college or organization), if applicable
- Names of co-authors, if applicable
- Brief abstract (250 word limit)
- Audio-visual needs (e.g. laptop, projector, screen, etc.)

Send information (email preferred) to Dan Bieker:

Email: danbieker@gmail.com

Phone: 434-971-9618

Postal address: Dan Bieker, 4174 Laird Lane,

North Garden, VA 22959

Have an Interesting Bird Story to Tell? We Need YOU!

To help the VSO-affiliated bird clubs and other nature organizations across the state get great speakers for their meetings, the VSO publishes a Speakers Directory. You can see the previous 2018 – 2019 directory, visit the VSO's Web site at http://www.virginiabirds.org/publications/speakers-directory/.

It's time to create the 2020-2021 edition and we're always looking for new speakers to include in the directory. Please consider telling your birding story!

To list program(s) you are willing to present, please provide the title(s) and your contact information to me at gnatcatcher@gmail.com

NO LATER THAN MARCH 30th.

Have a look at the current directory to get an idea of the kind of write-up I'll need and contact me at gnatcatcher@gmail.com if you have any questions. The Speaker's Directory is distributed statewide, so you should be willing to travel but can specify limits in your speaker's profile.

The updated 2020-21 VSO Speakers Directory will be available at the VSO's 2020 Annual Meeting and on our Web site. We'd love to include your program!

Russell Taylor, Speakers Directory editor

COMING SOON!

Watch your email and the VSO website for the slate of candidates for election to officer and board of directors positions!

The election will be held at the VSO Annual Meeting in Williamsburg, May 1-3.

Restoring Peregrine Falcons to Virginia's Mountains

Biologist Rolf Gubler will present on restoring Peregrine Falcons, Sunday, March 1 at the Mt. Vernon Government Center, 2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria.

Peregrines are found in rural and urban environments and on every continent except Antarctica. They perch and nest on cliffs, skyscrapers, bridges, and other tall structures.

Since 2000, Gubler, has led Shenandoah National Park's Peregrine Falcon Restoration Program, a partnership of the National Park Service, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, William & Mary's Center for Conservation Biology, and the Virginia Department of Transportation.

Biologists bring at-risk peregrine falcon chicks from eastern Virginia bridge nest sites (where fledging is often difficult) to Virginia's mountains, once part of their historic range. The team hopes the birds will imprint on the park's cliffs and return as breeding adults.

The presentation is cosponsored by the Virginia Society of Ornithology, the Friends of Dyke Marsh, the Northern Virginia Bird Club, and the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia. An informal social, beginning at 1:30, will precede the presentation.

Photo by Ed Eder



NOW is the time to renew your VSO membership for 2020!

Use the form on the back page of the newsletter or renew online (safely and easily with your debit, credit card, or PayPal account) at the <u>VSO website</u>.

Your VSO membership runs from January to December each calendar year. First notices of renewals were sent in November, and we are grateful for those who have renewed so far! THANK YOU! Your dues and donations are so important to VSO's ongoing conservation, research, and education efforts.

If you have delayed renewing, please do so soon to save wear and tear on your "volunteer" Membership Secretary. The VSO is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, so your 2020 membership dues and any donations to the Second Breeding Bird Atlas or the VSO Conservation Fund are tax deductible in 2020.

Keep in mind that non-members have to pay a \$20 fee (individual) or \$25 fee (family of 2 or more) to participate in VSO field trips. Please make sure your membership is up to date to avoid the hassle of paying at the last minute.

If you have questions about your VSO membership status, feel free to contact Shirley Devan, Membership Secretary, at: vsomembership@cox.net

WELCOME NEW VSO MEMBERS!

Don Alexander, Mechanicsville, VA
Nancy Archer, Henrico, VA
Patricia Bartholomew, Sperryville, VA
Reinhard Beatty, Blacksburg, VA
Karen Bell, Woodbridge, VA
Randy Cline, Harrisonburg, VA
Justin Craig, Roanoke, VA
Kenneth Crouch, Blacksburg, VA
Maynard Davis, Crozet, VA

Bruce Davis, Yorktown, VA
Mary Figliola, Alexandria, VA
Amanda Gray, Harrisonburg, VA
Erin Halleran, Williamsburg, VA
John B. Harris, Marshall, VA
Richard Korpi, Strasburg, VA
Baron Lin, Richmond, VA
Michael Myers, Leesburg, VA
Bill Newman, Richmond, VA

Helen Oakley, Lynchburg, VA
Jan Reese, St. Michaels, MD
Frank and Lark Smith, Williamsburg, VA
Jeff & Mary Jean Sullivan, Cloverdale, VA
Sharlyn Thacker, Eggleston, VA
Sook Tominaga, Yorktown, VA
Richard Walker, New Cumberland, PA
Karen Waller, VA Beach, VA
Helen Wheelock, Lynchburg, VA

The Home Stretch - VABBA2's Final Year

By Dr. Ashley Peele, VABBA2 Coordinator

The final field season for the second VA Breeding Bird Atlas has arrived!

Some may look on this with relief, others with a little sadness, but project volunteers know that we've got to make one more strong push to fill the last gaps in our statewide breeding bird data collection.



Red-winged Blackbird nestlings. Photo by Dixie Sommers

You may be asking: how can I contribute to this final field season?

Here are a few suggestions...

<u>First</u>, check out the current **VABBA2 coverage map** in the Atlas Block Explorer Tool (found on the Maps page of <u>vabba2.org</u>) for guidance on where we still need summer birding effort. The Atlas project is aiming for 100% coverage of priority blocks, but we have prioritized completion of some based on historic data and other criteria.

Additionally, check out the real-time coverage map on our eBird portal at ebird.org/atlasva/effortmap.

Second, try to attend an Atlas summer rally event! These target under-surveyed locations around the state, but primarily in south-central and southwestern VA. Each event occurs from Friday-Sunday and is based in a VA State Park. All events provide an opportunity for volunteers to add new breeding bird records to key regions and habitats.

Here is the 2020 lineup for BBA rallies...

Summer 2020 Atlas Blockbusting Rally Schedule:

June 5-7 - Fairystone Rally near Martinsville

June 12-14 - Breaks Interstate Park near Grundy (See VSO Summer Field Trip info for details.)

June 19-21 - Occoneechee Rally near Clarksville

June 26-27 - Natural Tunnel Rally near Duffield

For all but the June 12-14 rally, register at vabba2.org under "Atlas Events."

<u>Lastly</u>, volunteers who cannot travel to bird for the Atlas but still wish to volunteer can still make valuable contributions to the project...

- 1) Check out the Atlas maps to see if any local priority blocks need a little more effort to be completed. Many still need nocturnal effort or a single day's effort to be finished up.
- 2) Visit and bird public properties like State Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), county or state parks, national forest sites, etc. near home. While priority blocks have been our primary focus (due to historical data coverage), it is still highly important to document breeding birds on public lands since these are likely to persist and remain key habitats into the future.

Field Trip to North Carolina's Outer Banks

By Meredith Bell, VSO Field Trip Co-chair

Despite a little rain on Saturday and some strong winds, the January 31-February 2, 2020, annual VSO field trip to the Outer Banks was fantastic!

With the combined eyes and ears of 90 participants, we tallied 148 species. Our trip leaders Lee Adams, Bill Akers, Jerry Via, Mike Schultz and yours truly worked hard to ensure that everyone got to see as many species as possible.

With four of the species, you might have thought we were in Florida! Common Gallinule and Wood Stork were seen by several people in a ditch off the road about a mile from the hotel. A few scored Sandhill Cranes in Pungo and an Anhinga at Lake Mattamuskeet.

And those weren't the only specialties. We had Ash-throated Flycatcher and Cattle Egret at ARNWR. Then Sunday morning participants had excellent, extended looks at a Red Wolf as we followed its movements south along Miltail Road at ARNWR. Such a rare opportunity to see this endangered, elusive animal.





Cattle Egret. Photo by Curtis Badger

AND we scored all 8 woodpecker species, as two participants saw 2 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers at Palmetto-Peartree Preserve. We also had 8 sparrow species and 5 wren species throughout the weekend.

The wind at Jennettes's Pier was brutal, yet worth the discomfort to see Common Eider, all 3 Scoter species, Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, Horned Grebe and Northern Gannet. Other species observed by a few people from the hotel included Dovekie and Long-tailed Duck.

At Bodie Island Lighthouse Saturday afternoon, we enjoyed diverse species of waterfowl in the impoundments, along with a Virginia Rail.

Make plans to join us next year. We always have a memorable time, no matter what the weather brings!

Complete list of 148 species for the weekend is on the VSO website at

https://www.virginiabirds.org/

Ash-throated Flycatcher. Photo by Doug Pfeiffer

VSO Summer Field Trip to Breaks Interstate Park June 12-14, 2020

Join us June 12-14, 2020, at Breaks Interstate Park in beautiful southwest Virginia for VSO's summer field trip!

In conjunction with Dr. Ashley Peele, State Coordinator for the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas (VABBA2), the trip will also be a volunteer rally event for the final season of this important project. We welcome your eyes and ears as we search for signs of breeding birds in this underbirded area of Virginia.

TRIP REGISTRATION. To help us plan for the weekend, please register in advance. Provide the names of participants in your party with a telephone number and email address so we can contact you if needed. Register by emailing or calling Meredith Bell, trip coordinator, at merandlee@gmail.com or 804-824-4958.

HEADQUARTERS. The lodge at Breaks Interstate Park is the host hotel. The special rate for the VSO block of rooms at the lodge is \$74.95/night (plus tax). Besides Friday and Saturday nights, the hotel has blocked additional rooms for Thursday and Sunday, for those who may want to stay extra nights. There are refrigerators and coffee pots in all rooms. Register by Tuesday, MAY 1, by phone and mention Virginia Society of Ornithology to get the special rate: (276) 865-4413, ext 0.

MEALS. The lodge restaurant is open daily from 7:00am to 9:00pm. Bring snacks, beverages and lunch for Saturday and Sunday (if you'll be with us all day) since we won't return to the lodge until late afternoon. You'll have a small refrigerator in your room to store perishables.

SCHEDULE. Field trips will be held:

Friday, June 12 – afternoon only – Explore areas in the park.

Saturday, June 13 – all day. We'll divide into small groups to cover Atlas Priority Blocks.

Saturday evening – We'll have dinner as a group in the Banquet Room.

Sunday, June 14 – all day (or AM only for some). We'll divide into small groups to cover Atlas Priority Blocks.

We are still finalizing the locations we'll visit, and a detailed itinerary will be sent to all registrants prior to the trip. Our goal is to cover as many priority blocks as possible on Saturday and Sunday.

If you have any questions, contact field trip coordinator Meredith Bell at (804) 824-4958 or merandlee@gmail.com.



Breaks Interstate Park. Photo www.drc.virginia.gov

VSO OFFICERS

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Terms Expire 2020

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Terms Expire 2021

Patti Reum, Highland County Cheryl Jacobson, Williamsburg **James Fox, Front Royal**

Terms Expire 2022

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2020 VSO Membership Renewal

n e	email to notify you of upcoming events, field trips, annual meetings, and organization news. You may opt out of these email notices at any time.)
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-	lf you have questions about your membership, contact Membership Secretary Shirley Devan at:

vsomembership@cox.netYour support means so much to the success of the VSO. Thank you!

The Virginia Society of Ornithology is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and all membership fees

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