

# Narputungup News

August  
2007 No 3

from the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park



## Spring events for Friends

### 1. Walk to Swan Pool (Sunday 16th September)

'Friends' will conduct a guided walk to Swan Pool on the Phillips River on Sunday 16th September 2007. The walk is not difficult and particularly suitable for children; total length is 12-13 km with 4-5 km on a graded track, 5 km on an overgrown FWD track and 3 km trackless along the river. Wildflowers, birds, geological features, mountain scenery and river pools will be aspects you might find of interest.

**When and where to meet?** 9.30 am at the National Park sign at the Pitchi Ritchi turn-off on John Forrest Road. The sign is 12 km along the road from its origin on the Ravensthorpe – Hopetoun Road.

**What to bring?** Hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, camera, ankle supporting footwear and clothing appropriate for the weather. If it is hot, swimming in the pool is an option. Bring your lunch and sufficient drinks for the day as we will stop for lunch at the pool. If allergic to bees bring antihistamines as unfortunately these days feral bee encounters are an ever present risk in wooded or rocky bushland.

The walk will finish mid afternoon at Pitchi Ritchi where afternoon tea will be provided. The walk complements the Ravensthorpe Wildflower Show and its market day that is on Saturday 15 th. Why not come to Ravensthorpe – Hopetoun and make an early spring weekend of it? Please register your intention to walk by phoning Andy Chapman on 9838 1149. This is in case unforeseen circumstances, e.g. the weather, require a change of plan.

### 2. Carnabys Cockatoo weekend (27-28th October)

'Friends' and Birds Australia will jointly present a Carnabys Cockatoo weekend over 27 – 28th October. Activities will commence with a presentation by Raana Scott (who is the South Coast Project Officer for the Carnabys Cockatoo Recovery Project) at 7.30 pm on Saturday 27th October in the Red Room of the Community Centre in Morgans Street, Ravensthorpe. Raana will outline initiatives being undertaken to conserve this threatened, endemic and iconic bird in south-western WA. We hope to have the benefit of an additional speaker in Dr Stephen Davies, former CSIRO Wildlife scientist, well known for research on emus, cockatoos and arid zone ecology of birds. Tea/coffee and snacks will be provided at the conclusion.

On Sunday 28th we will go searching for nesting cockatoos in both Cocanarup Timber Reserve and Jim Dunn Reserve which are respectively 15 & 10 km south-west of Ravensthorpe. This search follows successful searching in 2006 and will also assess to what extent a wildfire in November 2006 diminished nesting habitat or success.

**When and where to meet?** Sunday 28 October at 9.00 am at the National Park information shelter in the car park opposite the Community Centre in Ravensthorpe. We will drive to search sites, FWD is not necessary, some vehicle sharing is possible. We should finish mid afternoon.

**What to bring?** Hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, binoculars, camera, notebook and GPS if possible, lunch and drinks. Bush type clothing appropriate to the weather on the day. If allergic to bees bring antihistamines as unfortunately these days feral bee encounters are an ever present risk in wooded or rocky bushland.

Next issue: November

For further information contact Andy Chapman 9838 1149 or Raana Scott 9842 0011

## In Our Backyard: Notes from the Rangers at FRNP



Autumn has seen a hive of activity in the park. Firstly there have been two prescribed burns completed successfully. One was in the FR4 block near the Quaalup private property enclaves. This burn affords the private property protection from unplanned fire entering the area from the south west and effectively breaks up a large area of even age, thus providing a mosaic of fuel ages.

The second prescribed burn was adjacent to the Bell Track Dieback infestation. This burn is significant in value due to the fact that should an unplanned fire enter the dieback infected area there would be some serious setbacks to planning and mitigation of the spread of the fungus. By this I mean that should fire enter the area, surface and sub surface water runoff would increase and carry the fungus quickly into uninfected areas, increasing the size of the infected area and have devastating effects on the parks biodiversity. To compound this, when an area is burnt, it could be upwards of 10 years before any interpretation of the spread of the infestation can be carried out and a clear picture of the scope of the problem can be gained. The completed burn affords the area protection from summer wildfires entering from the north west and around to the south west.

Post-fire repairs to infrastructure are progressing steadily. On the east side of the park the steps have been rebuilt to access the beach at Quoin Head. Readers will remember that new access steps were built in autumn 2006 by Hopetoun builder John Brouwer and ranger staff over a two week period. These steps unfortunately burnt during the wildfire on the Whoogarup Range in October '06. Take 2 of the steps was completed in Autumn '07 and again, thanks to John and Stephen Mills for their efforts. The Quoin Head site will however remain closed until the fragile dune and fore dune systems can rehabilitate and DEC can carry on with infrastructure replacement.



The 4 Mile campsite will also remain closed until infrastructure has been replaced and some rehabilitation has occurred. In the meantime we have been busy with a local contractor mulching dead and

dangerous mallee limbs from around the campsites. The mulch will be used for rehabilitation and stabilisation of the sand areas to prevent wind scouring. DEC Landscape Branch are very

close to deciding on final plans for the ablution block design. West Beach Point and Mylies sites which were closed after fires have been re-opened.

The East Mt Barren walk trail is now underway and should be completed by mid July. The initial phase is to rebuild the first 200m in boardwalk. Again John Brouwer is assisting ranger staff to complete this job. Again, we would ask for the public to observe the closure as during the rebuilding job as there are inherent dangers.

On the West side of the park the West Mt Barren walk trail has been re-opened to the public. Ranger Garry Carr and the Jerramungup District High School DEC Bush-ranger unit completed the first 40m of boardwalk. Garry has carried out a safety assessment of the site and we were able to re-open the site on Friday 29 June.



On another note, Ranger Garry Carr has resigned from DEC to take up a position in Victoria with Melbourne Water where he will be responsible for the mitigation of fire in the



*Garry Carr - a great builder!*

Upper Yarra catchment area. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Garry for his support and dedication to tasks, all of which he has carried out with professionalism and with great leadership. It is not easy to replace someone like

Garry, who finished up in the park on 12/7/07. GOOD LUCK Garry.

A joint DEC and South Coast NRM (SCRIPT) survey for Chuditch was carried out during March '07 and the information below, provided by DEC Principal Technical Officer Brent Johnson from the Woodvale Wildlife Research Centre, gives a summary of the findings from that trip.

The Ravensthorpe area was selected for investigation following the recent increase in local sightings and road kills of *Dasyurus geoffroii* - chuditch. These reports came from the highway both east and west of the township and some 20 km north along Woodenup Road adjacent to the Jerdacuttup River crossing.

Phase 1 of the survey was conducted in the vicinity of the intersection of the Ravensthorpe Range and the South Coast Highway and north above Carlingup Road. The trap line followed the Jerdacuttup River Valley and then ascended into the Salmon Gum uplands and dissected ridges. North of Carlingup Rd the traps followed the western flank of the range. A separate 20 cage trap line was positioned along Woodenup Road which runs through low mallee shrubland in the northern portion of uncleared bushland above the range. This trap line spanned the Jerdacuttup River valley. This was later augmented with a further 11 traps south of the Woodenup - Floater Rd intersection along the firebreak. This was an area of mostly mallee regrowth.

Phase 2 saw the trap lines moved to the Cocanarup Timber Reserve 15 km west of Ravensthorpe as recent road kills had been located adjacent to the Phillips River bridge. The Phillips River dissects this reserve along a north – south line and the trap line was located to the east of the river due to the recent wildfire. From Cocanarup Road the trap line followed the Manyutup Creek east toward Moir Track. The northern half of traps were located in Salmon Gum woodland with the rest a mix of mallee, Salmon Gum and riparian vegetation.

Additional to the trapping effort was the placement of hair tubes to the south along Moir Track adjacent to the Phillips River and also in the vicinity of Hamersley Inlet. These were set early in the survey and collected 7 nights later.

Ravensthorpe Range yielded 8 captures of 6 individual chuditch (all female). Brush tail possums: 7 captures of 6 individuals. All possums came from salmon gum habitat whilst all chuditch were found in the Woodenup Road vicinity.



Cocanarup yielded 6 captures of 4 individual chuditch. Possums: 7 captures of 6 individuals. All captures of both species came from the salmon gum woodland centred in the timber reserve itself.

Other captures were similar from both sites: bush rats, bobtails and goannas. Analysis of the hair tube samples revealed primarily possum and bush rat activity.

The capture of so many chuditch is noteworthy. It indicates a significant population, more substantial than the few previous records have indicated. The nearest known population is at Lake Magenta to the east. There are records from Frank Hann Reserveto the north and the occasional capture record or sighting within the eastern Fitzgerald, south of Ravensthorpe. Additionally a single male was recently captured at Dunne Rock Nature Reserve. Geographically Ravensthorpe is central to all these locations. It can only be surmised whether there is movement between these sites. DNA analysis is currently being undertaken but it is unlikely to show the population as discreet.

Whilst the chuditch captures were located in differing vegetation (Salmon Gum at Cocanarup, low mallee scrub at Woodenup) both had trap lines positioned in relatively long unburnt bush. Woodenup and Cocanarup have been baited since Sept 1998 and Sept 1997 respectively although the majority of captures came from sites near to the perimeter with unbaited farmland. The perimeter of the northern Ravensthorpe Range has only been baited since February 2007 and the Woodenup trap line runs approximately 2-3 km from this interface with private property.

The results confirm the importance of maintaining the baiting regime and to take a precautionary attitude to the planning and undertaking of any operations throughout all habitats in the Ravensthorpe Range, Cocanarup and other bushland in the area. Applications for mining tenements or other commercial activities should also be assessed accordingly. Obviously the adjoining Fitzgerald River National Park should also be included in this rationale.

It should be accepted that the Chuditch is likely to remain listed as 'vulnerable' for the foreseeable future and that this population, if not genetically, is geographically significant for the conservation of this species.

### The Future

This population warrants further investigation. Should funding be available in the future a closer examination would be beneficial to look at ecological aspects eg: the extent of the population, genetics, and habitat/refuge use. With the Chuditch Recovery Plan due to be re-written there may be more focus on semi-arid populations such as this one as there is limited data on this species outside of forest regions. These results encourage the undertaking of further surveys of conservation reserves such as Peak Charles, Dundas, Frank Hann and other areas that fall within the SCNRM boundaries.

### Cat Control & the Western Ground Parrot

The Western Ground Parrot is a critically endangered South Coast endemic occurring as small populations in the Fitzgerald River and Cape Arid National Parks. While there is no direct evidence that feral cats predate on the Western Ground Parrot, there is a high likelihood that they are having an impact given their relative abundance in the Fitzgerald River National Park and the ground dwelling and nesting habits of Western Ground Parrot.

The only confirmed breeding areas are located in Fitzgerald River National Park, and protection of these from cat predation is identified as a high priority in the South Coast Threatened Birds Recovery Plan.

Actions identified by the South Coast Threatened Birds recovery plan include-

- Conducting field trials using the non-toxic bio marker rhodamine encapsulated in the baits during spring 2007 Western Shield fauna survey in the FRNP to determine non-target uptake.
- Undertaking autumn 2008 trial of 1080 baits for reducing cat numbers in important breeding sites for Western Ground Parrots in the Fitzgerald River National Park using one 100 km<sup>2</sup> cat baiting grid and two 100 km<sup>2</sup> control grids
- Setting up and implementing a cat reduction experiment using one trapping transect and two control transects of approximately 25 km each associated with baited and control grids.
- Monitoring cat numbers through track counts on specially prepared sand pads in control and experimental grids.
- Monitoring other non-target species to provide indicative changes in impact from feral cat predation. Analysis of stomach contents of trapped cats to determine presence of native species.

Mark Moore: Senior Ranger June 2007  
Fitzgerald River National Park ph 98355 04 fax 98355 045  
email mark.moore@dec.wa.gov.au

### Art Weekend at Twertup 13 & 14th October

Join a group for a creative and enriching weekend  
Contact Louise Lodge for more details 0427700613  
Email: louisemlodge@westnet.com.au

## Dr John Banister talks about hump-back whales

*This is part of an adapted transcript of the talk given prior to the AGM in March 2007. My apologies for any errors! - Ed.*

You occasionally see humpbacks here generally from June to August and not after that. They are moving from east to west and the reason for that is because they are migrating north at that time from the Antarctic where they have been feeding and they hit the coast and want to go left and up the west coast. When they are going back again down to the Antarctic they tend not to come along this coast because there's no reason for them to; they come down the west coast and shoot straight off down to the Antarctic so you should not see them here after about August.

They're called humpbacks because they have a humpy back and a very prominent dorsal fin. The main thing about them apart from the warts and bumps on their heads is the serrated tail and the enormously long claw-like flippers. So if you see an animal that's got a humpy fin and claw-like flippers there's nothing else that it can be but a humpback!

The American whalers and others took them off this coast, but they concentrated on them when they couldn't get sperm whales in the summer. Then they came here in the winter and they caught them off various places on the west coast. If you been to the Dampier Archipelago you will know that there are still tripods on some islands (*which were used for whale spotting*) the result of these people being there, but there was also a coastal fishery there in the 1870s.

I came out here did some work on the animals that were being caught in Carnarvon near Pt Cloates in the early 1960s and they were being caught off the east coast in the late 50s and 60s.. They put marks on the animals and they checked them after they were killed and they discovered that there were 2 groups of animals in Australia – one lot that bred off the west coast and the other lot that bred essentially off the east coast and there was a bit of mixing in between on the feeding grounds. Essentially there were 2 populations.

They were catching them off Carnarvon and Pt Cloates from 1949 and they started - let's say on an index of 5 - by the mid 1950s they had gone down to say 3 ½. Then there was a decline to the early 1960s when they were down to less than 1 so there was a huge number being taken. Off the east coast they went down rapidly then plateaued out and then there was a huge dive down. The problem was that they were being caught not only in Australia, but also in the Antarctic, the same population. They were taking several thousand a year, the population could stand it but they came right down. But by the early 1960s it was not economical to catch humpbacks. When I first came here in 1964 they were looking for something else to catch Off Carnarvon they were looking to see if they could catch sperm whales.

Why had there been this enormous dive down here? There was a lot of illegal catching going on. There was some catching here in the 1930s, again in 1949-69. The problem was that there were a lot not being reported and by 1959 there were a lot more being taken than were being reported. It was the Soviets again; they were taking them illegally. There was a lot of protection on them – you could only take them on 4 days a year, but that was what caused that enormous drop particularly on the east coast. They reported only

about 6000 being caught, but in fact it was about 17000. The result of that was that when I came here they were virtually extinct. They were catching them largely in the Antarctic around in the summer December January.

*Q How did they find out that the Soviets were doing it?*

There were some very brave biologists on board – they employed biologists. They sent in the right details, as did the company catching them, but then someone in Moscow fudged the figures and sent them in to the Whaling Commission – the official figures were fudged. The biologists kept copies of their data; one man kept literally piles of paper in boxes for 30 years and in 1993/4 after Perestroika had happened they came out into the open, so it wasn't till the 1990s that we knew that this was what had been going on.

When I came here in 1964 humpbacks were almost unknown down here, but by the early 70s there began to be reports of them. *This picture* was taken by Barry Wilson – this animal had an extraordinary scar and we could not work it out – then it became obvious – It was one that the Soviets had chased and they had fired a harpoon into it and it had escaped and disappeared. It might have been done 6/7 years before. It was quite fortuitous that this picture was taken in the 1970s. About 1970s onwards there were more and more reports of humpbacks around Shark Bay

In our research first of all we flew 10 days out of Carnarvon in the areas where the whaling companies had been catching them in the late 70s early 80s, mostly on their northern migration in the middle of July. By 1994 the last year that we did this there were about 500 in the area. The numbers were increasing. The numbers seem to be going up about 13%. It would be pretty hard for humpbacks to increase at 13%, but it actually looks as if they were increasing by about 10% which is what they can just do by reproducing every one or two years.

So in the mid 1990s you can see that they were increasing at about 10%. In 1999 and 2005 the weather was terrible *which made surveys very difficult* but there seem to be more animals around. We reckoned there were about 10,000 animals in the population in 1999, whereas when the Soviets had finished in 1990 we reckoned there were about 5000. They should increase at 10% every 7 years.

### Park to lose Steve Mills - Hopetoun ranger

Steve (pictured below) and Esther Mills and their 3 sons are leaving Hopetoun, probably in late September, for Nannup.



Steve will become Senior Ranger in charge of several National Parks in the Blackwood district. He will be based at Nannup.

Steve and Esther have been in Hopetoun for seven years and will be sorry to leave. However, Steve comes from Pemberton and his family is there so he will be happy to be closer to them.

We'll miss you all!

## Department of Environment and Conservation

Government of Western Australia

24 July 2007

### Media Statement

#### Fence to protect against deadly plant pathogen

A 12-kilometre fence has been constructed to stop the spread of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* through Fitzgerald River National Park. *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is an introduced water mould that attacks plant roots, stopping the uptake of water and nutrients which results in death of the plant. The disease in the plant is known as *Phytophthora* dieback.

Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) Senior Operations Officer Malcom Grant said completion of the fence was a significant milestone in the overall plan to halt the spread of *Phytophthora* through the park.

"For the most part Fitzgerald River National Park is *Phytophthora* free," Mr Grant said. "However, an infestation along Bell Track is having a devastating effect over a localised area of about 200 hectares. If left unmanaged, the infestation has the potential to spread and would have a profound impact on a much larger area of the park."

The fence, which took nearly four weeks to complete, now surrounds the entire Bell Track infestation. It is 1.8 metres high and has two rows of barbed wire at the top and rabbit netting trenched into the ground. The fence will prevent kangaroos from moving infested soil, one of the main identified risk factors for the spread of the infestation within Fitzgerald River National Park.

Strict measures were taken during construction of the fence to ensure that work did not contribute to spreading the infestation. Hygiene management encompassed the wash down and inspection of all vehicles and machines, restricted access along the fence alignment and preventing the movement of vehicles and equipment at the site on wet soil days.

"Construction of the fence is just one element of a complex *Saving our Species* project aimed at containing the Bell Track infestation within its current micro catchment," Mr Grant said.

"Other elements include surface and sub-surface hydrological studies, soil and epidemiology research and a high intensity phosphite application trial. These projects have so far achieved great results and put the Department in a good position to deal with the devastating effects of *Phytophthora* dieback on the park's flora and fauna."

*Saving our Species* is a two-year, \$15 million State Government initiative designed to boost efforts to protect Western Australia's unique biodiversity.

**DEC media: Katie Schoch 6467 5555**

#### Twertup cleaning roster

August - \*\*\*\*  
September - Anne Gadsby  
October - Barbara Miller-Hornsey  
November - Gil Craig  
December - Ken and Priscilla Broadbent  
January & February - \*\*\*\* volunteers, please  
March - AGM

#### Ravensthorpe Wildflower Show - Silver Anniversary

Some special events have been organised to celebrate this special year. The Committee would like to invite any Friends members to these events and to come and look at the 700 wildflowers on display at the Senior citizens Centre from 9 am -4 pm, September 8th-22nd. (Funds raised go to the Senior Citizens and the Dance Cottage Museum)

On the opening day - **Saturday September 8th** - during the morning Margaret Pieroni, the well-known wildlife artist, has agreed to demonstrate her technique. Morning tea will be available next door at Red Room.

In the afternoon, at 5 pm, Southern Scribes (the writers' group) will serve wine and nibbles when they launch their delightful book of wildflower poetry.

On **Saturday 15th** a Festival has been organised in the Town Hall. There will be stalls and other activities and speakers will talk on nature-based themes:

Tony Friend (of DEC) - releasing threatened animals into safe habitats

Rosie Jaspar and others - surveying the Ravensthorpe Range

Katie Syme -collecting and preserving fungi

Kevin Thiele (the new Head of the WA Herbarium) - his work at the herbarium.

**For further information ring 9838 3828**

On **Sunday 16th** Andy Chapman will lead a walk at the eastern edge of the FRNP. Access will be from the Hopetoun Rd, along John Forrest Rd, turning left down Phillips River Rd after crossing the Steere River. Andy will ferry walkers across the Phillips River. They will then make their way along the western side of Culham Inlet to the ocean. This should be fairly easy walking as a fire cleared the ground last October.

**For details - ring Andy on 9838 1149**

#### The Western Ground Parrot Recovery Project – Update

With the nesting season now just around the corner, project staff are gearing up for another search for the elusive Western Ground Parrot nest and have plans to radio-track a pair of breeding birds in the FRNP. Recent surveys indicate declining numbers of Western Ground Parrots in the park and very little recolonisation of available habitat is taking place. The three main factors for declines are thought to be the **3 F's**: **fires** (uncontrolled wildfires), **ferals** (predation by feral foxes and cats) and **fragmentation** (isolated patches of suitable habitat mainly as a result of past land clearing). Another factor could be related to the breeding success (or lack of success) of the birds. The radio-tracking study this year may give us insight into the breeding biology of this elusive bird and help to identify some basic information such as clutch size, home range size and fledging success rate. All this information will give us a better picture of how this elusive parrot fits into the park's dynamic ecosystem. Volunteer assistance will be required. If you'd like to help out please see contact details below....

Mike Barth – Project Officer  
ph. (08) 9842 4519, mobile 0429 842 451  
or e-mail: michael.barth@dec.wa.gov.au

## Bits 'n Pieces (short, but significant)

### Website - great news - check it out!

Our website is up and running. It has details of our group, upcoming activities, information for prospective new members, merchandise, and great pictures of the park.

[www.fitzgeraldfriends.org.au](http://www.fitzgeraldfriends.org.au)

### A confession from our President:

"I would like to 'fess up to an error in my President's report (in the May edition). The anticipated population for Hopetoun is 1500 not 5000 as reported."

By the way - Andy's phone number is 9838 1149 (not 69 as printed in the last edition.)

### New members

'Friends' would like to welcome all new members, many of whom are new Hopetoun residents brought to our region by the Ravensthorpe Nickel project. It is our sincere hope that your time in our community will be of value to you and that you, like us, will come and enjoy and appreciate Fitzgerald River National Park.

John Scheepers - Albany  
 Fran Cusworth,  
 JM Schofield  
 P McAtackney  
 Jane Waterton - .  
 Chris and Sherry Malcolm  
 Melanie Corker  
 Maria Lee - all of Hopetoun

### Donations

The FFRNP would like to express their particular thanks to members -

Mrs Rodney Van Proctor of Gooseberry Hill,; AM & GC Barr and K & S J Henderson

-for their most generous donations to the 'Friends'.

### Information Leaflet - and maps

A new colourful information leaflet (which looks almost good enough to eat!) has been produced for the Friends by member Vivienne Hillyer who was responsible for the Fitzgerald Biosphere map. Remember that we have these beautiful maps available for sale. Check the website.

## Productive working bee at Twertup

A big "thankyou" to all who helped on our working bee on the 12/13th May.

Kevin Giles came from Kulin to replace the 'leaning plank' on the garage with a more sophisticated door locking mechanism. He also replaced the dangerous paver on the back verandah a custom-made safer drain cover and helped with other important jobs.

Head Ranger Mark Moore gave up his day off to improve the steps and provide assistance in rebuilding the wall section on the garage which was in danger of collapsing.

President Andy Chapman gave all-round help - as usual!

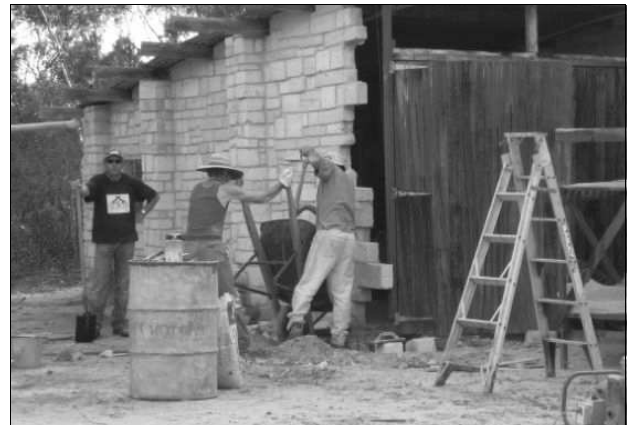
Natasha Moore and daughters Hettie and Tessa carried bricks. Hettie and Tessa amused us with their antics!

Anne Gadsby and Priscilla Broadbent improved seating comfort by re-covering some of the chairs in the kitchen, and they cleaned out the cupboard under the sink. They also got rid of a lot of unwanted pots and pans. Thanks to Gil for supply of vinyl and use of her upholstery equipment.

An enjoyable weekend was had by all.

A big thankyou to Carsten and Karen Richelmann for coming up from Quaalup Homestead and braving adverse weather to help finish rebuilding the wall on 30th June-1st July.

*Mark Jeffery, Building Manager*



*Two hard at work, the third supervising!*

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