



Oklahoma City Audubon Society

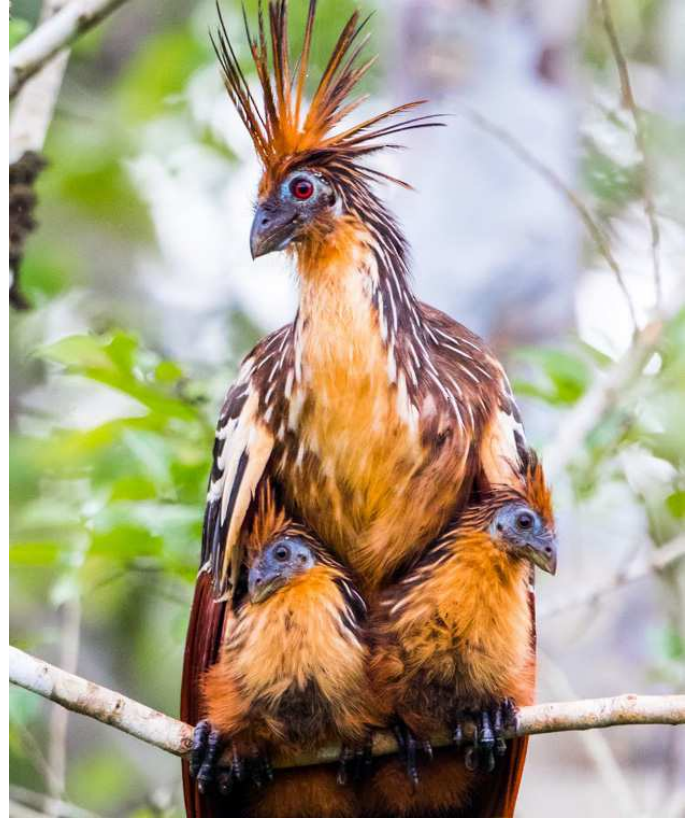
OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

DECEMBER 2018

December: Tall Bird Tales

Telling “Tall Bird Tales” will again highlight our annual December meeting on December 17, accompanied by holiday culinary delights and camaraderie. Bring yourselves and your anecdotes and yarns to regale fellow members with your wonderful, beautiful, harrowing or death defying birding experiences. Great birds have shown up in Oklahoma this past year and some truly great birders have had truly great times with those and many other birds, not only in Oklahoma but in other parts of the world. Be certain to practice to insure the believability of your rendering.

Also, for the program Warren Harden invites everyone to invent names for groups of birders. We have group names for birds such as a gaggle of geese, an exaltation of larks, a convocation of eagles and a murder of crows. No correspondingly accepted, descriptive names for groups of birders exist, but why not? Birding in a blizzard, wading through a swamp, craning the neck for migrating warblers in trees high overhead, getting sea sick trying to spot seabirds through a binocular while in an undulating boat on the open ocean are examples of situations that can inspire one to create applicable names for such people, namely us. Bring your names along with your tall tales and let's have fun being who we are.



The smelliest bird on the planet... also known as the skunk bird

Come out for the fun and friendship and sharing. A good time will be had by all.

Refreshments: Everyone is encouraged to bring something to share for the December meeting.

Our meetings are held September through June on the third Monday of each month (with the exception of January, when the meeting is held on the fourth Monday). Meetings begin at 7 p.m. Visitors are always welcome.

Meeting Location:

Our meetings are held at the Will Rogers Garden center, located at the intersection of NW 36th Street and I-44.

Make a note! The Will Rogers Garden Center is closed on the 3rd Monday of January 2019 in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. The January meeting will be held January 28, 2019.

President's Perspective

By Betsy Hacker

As 2018 draws to a close, I am reflecting on a year filled with opportunities and challenges and I'm grateful to have served as OCAS president along side a helpful board of directors and enthusiastic members and volunteers.



As we celebrate the Holidays with family and friends, let's take a few minutes to remember and be grateful to those brave individuals who fought and acted to protect our Nations' birds by ratifying the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This Act protects birds over the rights of private property owners, the fashion industry, trophy hunters, and more. Many birds we commonly see may have gone extinct if not for this Act.

Today, we are fortunate to see birds in our yards, in parks, and in wildlife areas but many challenges still remain. As cities grow and spread, new development strips the landscape of natural vegetation. Parks cut down dead trees that provide nesting habitat. Urban lawns are treated with chemicals that are harmful to birds and waterways. What happens to the birds when they lose their habitat or it is polluted with chemicals and garbage? The easy answer is that they move on to other areas. But are we sure that's what they do?

We are fortunate to have city parks that provide habitat for birds. Many of these parcels are large enough to attract a vast variety of bird but because they are fragmented parcels of land and not managed to provide habitat, they become dead zones to all but a few common species.

Many cities are converting these fragmented dead zones into habitat zones and are attracting more species by establishing habitat corridors. OCAS has begun working with the OKC Parks Department to improve park habitat and now that the door has opened, they are asking us for more help. The future holds real opportunities to attract more birds into our City parks. More about that in 2019!

Raffle to raise funds for Bluebird and Prothonotary Warbler Boxes

Last month Mike Mather donated a beautiful hand crafted box for a fund raiser to purchase bluebird and prothonotary warbler houses. Since that time, Brian Marra has donated one of his amazing photos of a Prothonotary Warbler, I've donated a bottle of wine, and I'm still accepting items to for raffle so currently I don't have a list of all the items that will be raffled off. I have never organized a raffle, so please forgive



me if I teeter a bit and BTW, all suggestions are welcome!

Beginning in January, we will sell raffle ticket for \$5 each or three tickets for \$10. Because it takes awhile to promote a fund raiser, and not everyone comes to all the meetings, tickets will be on sale through May. Drawing will be held at the May meeting.

Special Thanks. A big thank you to Hal Yocum, Bill Diffin, and Neil Garrison for co-leading the December 1 field trip at Martin Nature Park. Who knew 22 people would show up for this field trip! I think Hal was a bit overwhelmed until Bill and Neil step up to help "divide and conquer."

As this year comes to a close, there are so many people to thank for their gift of time and wisdom, all of which contribute to making OCAS a fine organization dedicated to birding.

Oklahoma City Audubon Society

Officers 2018

President	Elizabeth Hacker	638-6210
Vice President	John Shackford	340-5057
Secretary	Sharon Henthorn	521-9958
Treasurer	Nancy Vicars	831-1945
Parliament	Ted Golden	354-3619
Programs	Warren Harden	596-2759
Recorder	Esther M. Key	735-1021
Conservation	Dave Woodson	601-622-3467
Field Trips	Nancy Vicars	831-1945
	Jimmy Woodard	365-5685
	Hal Yokum	819-4852
Newsletter Editor	Pat Velte	751-5263
Publicity	Doug Eide	495-8192
Historian	Vacant	
Refreshments	Sue Woodson	601-622-3467
Webmaster	Pat Velte	751-5263

The Oklahoma City Audubon society is neither a chapter of nor affiliated with National Audubon.

For up-to-date Oklahoma City Audubon news visit:
OKC-Audubon.org

Bird of the Month



By John Shackford

The **Short-eared Owl** (*Asio flammeus*) is one of the most widespread avian species in the world. It is found on every continent except Australia and Antarctica, as well as many out of the way places like the Galapagos Islands, Iceland, and Hawaiian Islands.

In Oklahoma it is a “transient and winter visitant seen from September 29 to May 3” (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 364-5). Reinking (2004, *Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas*, p. 188-89) termed them as “rare breeders” in the state; winter is when they are most common in Oklahoma, when birds come southward into the state.

Reinking (2017, *Oklahoma Winter Bird Atlas*, p. 272-3) states that “[t]hey can be active day or night, but most hunting is done at dawn and dusk”; and that the Short-eared is “scattered statewide with highest concentration of records in northeastern tallgrass prairies.”



Many years ago I saw my first Short-eared thanks to John Newell. He had found several roosting in a north Oklahoma City grassy field which was quite far out in the country at the time (this field has long ago been incorporated into the middle of the greater Oklahoma City area); John shared the location and method of finding them with me--when they come off their roosting spots in tall grass in the late evening. If it is seen on our Christmas Bird Count, this is usually the time of day they are found, and they usually end up being one of the last species of the day to be recorded for the count.

With a decent look, identification in the field is not too difficult: my favorite identification field marks are a dark spot on the underside of each wing and a relatively slow “butterfly-like” wingbeat; also they often respond to “squeaking,” flying close to see what is causing the squeak.

The winter population trend of the Short-eared Owl on Oklahoma Christmas Bird Counts since 1960 has been slightly downward, but not alarmingly so (Reinking, *Winter Atlas* again).

A number of years ago while scouting out possible Christmas Bird Count species, I was once looking out toward the center of Lake Overholser in the afternoon and saw a crow-sized bird flying there. My original impulse was that it might be a Northern Harrier, but after a while I saw the black under the wing and the slow wingbeat and realized, much to my surprise, it was a Short-eared Owl. When I mentioned this to Warren Harden, he told me that on Galapagos Islands trips, he had seen them land on his boat twice at night and that the boat, both times, was about 20-40 miles off shore from the nearest island. Warren said that the birds were likely hunting for petrels

and shearwaters, possible prey items that are found over the ocean at night; however, he was still working on finding in his notes what time of year this was, on the possibility that the birds were actually migrating, rather than hunting. Then I read in Bent (1961, *Life histories of North American birds of prey, part 2*, p. 176), of one seen by William Bryan in October, 1902, that landed on a “vessel bound for the Hawaiian Islands and 680 miles from Puget Sound, and another in 1900, also in October, that was over water “some 500 miles from these oceanic islands,” thus over water far east of the Hawaiian Islands. Were these migrating Short-eareds or were the birds only hunting?

Back over land here in Oklahoma City, Warren and I once found several Short-eareds roosting and hunting at Countdown Farms, which was at about NW 150th Street and N. Pennsylvania. Countdown Farms had good grasslands and we were actually chasing Smith’s Longspurs, but found Short-eareds instead. We went back to the area with a young gentleman who was president of our bird club at the time (unfortunately both Warren and I have forgotten his name). As we were driving through the field we told him that we would probably see owls most any time now. Just exactly at that moment an owl flew up, possibly from the same roost spot we had jump it from before. From that moment on, the young gentleman would believe anything we said about birds—clearly much more credit than either Warren or I deserved!

During nesting season, the number of eggs laid is 4-9, but most commonly 5-7. They nest on the ground in open grasslands and are one of the few owls to build a nest, although it is usually quite rudimentary; the nesting sites they choose may be used for more than one year.

Darwin's finches have developed a taste for junk food, and it may be impacting their evolution

December 5, 2018 by UMass Boston Office Of Communications, University of Massachusetts Boston (excerpt)

A UMass Boston professor and his colleagues have published new research showing that feeding on human junk food may be altering the course of evolution in Darwin's finches.



Assistant Professor of Evolutionary Biology Luis De León says feeding on human foods is weakening natural selection on ground finch beaks, which is what drives the formation of new species in the wild. These findings, published in the journal *Evolutionary Applications*, suggest that the seemingly harmless activity of feeding birds might be altering the course of evolution in the iconic Darwin's finches in the Galápagos islands.

"If we continue to feed finches, we're not only affecting the individual species, but the processes that lead to the formation of new species," De León said. "We're getting in the way of evolution."

Galápagos finches are famed for being the inspiration behind Charles Darwin's pioneering work on evolution. They are an example of adaptive radiation, an evolutionary process that produces new species from a single, rapidly diversifying lineage. Their common ancestor arrived on the Galápagos about two million years ago, and since then Darwin's finches have evolved into more than a dozen recognized species differing in body size, beak shape, and feeding behavior.

De León and fellow researchers from UMass Amherst, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, McGill University, and Norwegian University of Science and Technology were on Santa Cruz Island when they found two forms of medium ground finches—a small and large version—while studying beak size at an isolated, pristine site.

When they repeated the same set of measurements at a nearby urban site, the distinction between the two beak sizes was not present. Studying data collected by other researchers in the 1970s, the researchers could see the two types of medium ground finches had been present in the area before, but something had changed in the last 40-50 years.

They hypothesized that the change might have to do with urbanization and the rapidly increasing human population in that area. In particular, the introduction of novel foods brought by humans.

Using egg crates filled with natural seeds and human junk food—chips, cookies, and rice—the researchers tested to see if the finches were in fact feeding on human food and what their preference was, weighing the food before and after to see how much was eaten.

De León said they found that finches in the urban area were almost exclusively feeding on human food. When the experiment was repeated at an isolated site in nature, the finches ignored the trays.

They found that "urban" finches feed on human junk foods, and in fact prefer these foods over their natural diet. This indicates that ongoing urbanization in the Galápagos is eroding the ecological differences that originally drove the formation of species in Darwin's finches.

"In contrast to their natural diet, the finches are changing their diet to human junk food," De León said. "We know one way finches diversify and become new species is by specializing in different food types. All three or four species of ground finches at urban sites on Santa Cruz Island seem to be converging onto the same junk food diet. If that's the case, the selection pressures that would be naturally keeping them apart would be weakening, possibly leading to the collapse of the adaptive radiation of ground finches."

Now that the researchers know that finches are changing their diets to human junk food, they need to look at the consequences for the actual evolution of the species on this island.

Minutes, November 19, 2018

Meeting was called to order by club president Betz Hacker. Guests were introduced and minutes of last meeting were approved without changes.

Treasurer Nancy Vicars reports \$5799.76 in the account.

The nominating committee reports that the slate of candidates for officers of 2019 are (unopposed) Valerie Bradshaw for parliamentarian and Grace Huffman for vice president. The remaining offices of president, secretary, treasurer, conservation will be filled by current officers renewing their duties for 2019. Offices of Field trip coordinator and Historian are unfilled and volunteers are appreciated.

Christmas Bird Count for the OKC count circle will be held on December 15th. Sightings are also accepted during the three days before and three days after the count date. Nathan Kuhnert will again be coordinating the participant assignments and compiling results. After the count, the group will meet at Johnnie's at 2652 W. Britton Road for results and a good meal. We have the room from 5-8 pm and will order from the menu. We are encouraged to bring our own desserts.

Hal Yocum reports the field trip to Mitch Park in Edmond November 14th was very successful. A total of 52 species were noted including an Eastern Towhee, Great Horned Owl, Red-breasted Nuthatch, five sparrow species and Northern Bobwhites. Hal will again host a field trip at Martin Park on December 1st at 7:30 am.

Neil Garrison, retired OKC park naturalist, is keeping the bluebird boxes at Will Rogers Park maintained for spring birds to use them; keeping other birds from nesting there.

OKC Parks Director Scott Copeland is asking for green areas to be considered in the new MAPS project. No decisions have been made, so feel free to provide your suggestions.

Lake Elmer in Kingfisher County has been added to OKC Audubon Birding HotSpots. Check the OCAS website for the report written by Zach Poland.

Meeting was adjourned and a snack break followed. The evening presentation was by Mike and Rosario Douglas, bringing us closer to the areas in southern Africa that they have visited.

Our next meeting will be at 7:00pm on December 17 at the same location at Will Rogers Park Garden Exhibition Building.

Sharon Henthorn, Club Secretary

Birding HotSpots in Lincoln and Creek Counties Added

Again this month we are excited to report additions to the Birding HotSpot reports on the OKC Audubon Society's website (<http://okc-audubon.org>).



Stroud Lake in Creek County

Thanks to Jimmy Woodard, we've been able to add Prague City Lake and Meeker Lake in Lincoln County as well as Stroud Lake in Creek County.

A little closer to the metro, Jimmy has provided HotSpot reports on Eagle Lake in Del City and the Soldier Creek Industrial Park Trails in Midwest City.

Whether you are traveling around central Oklahoma looking for good birding locations along the way or interested in finding new places to explore, visit our website and read the HotSpot reports.

DUES NOTICE

It's time once again to renew your annual membership for 2019. OCAS dues are \$15 per household and may be paid at the monthly meetings, online at our website <http://www.okc-audubon.org> or mailed to Nancy Vicars, Treasurer, 24 SE 57th St., OKC 73129.

Recorders Report November 2018

Once again feeder watchers are being surprised by Red-breasted Nuthatches and lake observers have found rare swimmers and gulls. After the sudden hard freeze early in the month, leaves left the trees to start composting on the forest floor creating homes for the insects that birds feed on as they scratch around. Creating places in the garden beds where leaves won't blow away but remain to create good bird habitat can be an interesting challenge for birdwatchers.

On the 1st in Grady County Jason Shaw came across American Wigeon and Pied-billed Grebe at the USAO Habitat Area and Ben Sandstrom tallied Black Vulture and White-throated Sparrow at Lake Louis Burtschi. In Kingfisher County Chris Butler located Red-tailed Hawk at Dover Marsh and Vesper Sparrow at Lake Elmer. In Newcastle Larry Mays reported Orange-crowned Warbler; and in Norman at William Morgan Park Emily Hjalmarson had Winter Wren and Wilson's Warbler. On the 3rd at Sanborn Lake Chris Butler noticed Orange-crowned Warbler and at Rose Lake Matt Jung saw Swainson's Hawk and on the 5th American Avocet.

On the 6th Bridger Arrington added Lincoln's Sparrow and Western Meadowlark at South Mulhall in Logan County. On the 7th Mercy Muigai viewed Osprey at George Sutton Wilderness Area in Norman. In OKC on Lake Hefner Surf Scoter and Black Scoters were observed by Bill Diffin, Roy McGraw, Steve Davis, Brian Marra, Deanne McKinney, on the 8th Ben Sandstrom and later in the month by several other birders. On the 8th Jennie Brooks photographed a dead American Woodcock found by a friend in downtown OKC; Dala Grissom verified Red-breasted Nuthatch in Bethel Acres in Pottawatomie County; and Caleb McKinney counted Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Flicker and Spotted Towhee west of Alex in Grady County. On the 10th Patricia Isaacson spotted Ross's Goose at Lake Hefner Prairie Dog Point.

On the 11th Nancy Vicars discovered Wood Duck at OKC Zoo Lake; and Roy McGraw detected Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Tecumseh Lake in Pottawatomie County. On the 13th Laura Madden recognized Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Spring Haven in McClain County; and Scott Loss documented **Western Grebe** and Common Loon at Lake Carl Blackwell in Payne County. On the 14th Christie Stoops recorded Redhead Duck and House Wren at

Cottonwood Creek in Logan County; and Grace Huffman, Hal Yocum and Betz Hacker encountered Northern Bobwhite, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Lincoln's Sparrow at Mitch Park in Edmond. On the 15th Greg Wilbert found Wood Duck at Little River State Park in Cleveland County; and Kent Andersson got Lincoln's Sparrow at Teal Ridge Wetland in Stillwater.

On the 16th in Garvin County Ben Sandstrom found Canvasback and Bonaparte's Gull at Lake R. C. Longmire and Spotted Towhee and Franklin's Gull at Paul's Valley Lake. In Lincoln County north of Prague Tamara Srader turned up Pine Siskin, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Harris's Sparrow; and at Stinchcomb WR in OKC Clarissa Sharp located Blue-headed Vireo. On the 17th in Stillwater Justin Agan came across Marsh Wren at Teal Ridge Wetland; and Jimmy Lovett noticed Purple Finch at The OSU Botanic Garden. In Newcastle Larry Mays confirmed Purple Finch; and at Lake Hefner City Docks Ben Sandstrom identified **Mew Gull**.



On the 18th Larry Mays spotted Red-breasted Nuthatch in Newcastle; Emily Hjalmarson recorded Swamp Sparrow along South Jenkins; Corey Barnes verified Smith's Longspur at Meridian Technology Center at OSU; and Bill Diffin saw Rusty Blackbird at Lake Hefner Prairie Dog Point. Zach Poland photographed **White-winged Scoter** at Lake Hefner Hobie Point and later it was seen at Prairie Dog Point by Bill Diffin, Bob and Chad Ellis. On the 19th Dustin Lynch got Greater Roadrunner near Cashion in Logan County; and Calvin Rees had Bufflehead at Lake Stanley Draper. On the 21st Emily Hjalmarson identified Canvasback, Common Goldeneye and Hooded Merganser at Summit Lake in Norman.

On the 22nd in Garvin County near Indian Meridian and OK-7 Sam S. detected American Pipit, Fox Sparrow and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; in Logan County Zach Poland observed Swamp Sparrow and Hairy Woodpecker at Mineral Wells Park and Snow Goose and Cackling Goose at his home; and in Midwest City



at Soldier Creek Industrial Park Recreation Trail Jimmy Woodward tallied American Tree Sparrow. On the 23rd at Lake Hefner City Docks Bill Diffin documented **California Gull**; along South Jenkins Paul Cook turned up Greater Yellowlegs and American Kestrel; in Norman Joe Grzybowski counted Red-breasted Nuthatch; and



John Tharp viewed Sandhill Crane. In Payne County Scott Loss encountered Lesser Black-backed Gull at Lake Carl Blackwell and Neotropic Cormorant at Boomer Lake Park. On the 24th Ben Sandstrom found Eared Grebe at Lake Overholser Coffey Dam; Ben Sandifer confirmed Rusty Blackbird, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Brown Creeper at Lake Thunderbird; and Corey Riding spotted Pine Siskin and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at The OSU Botanic Garden.

On the 25th Jason Shaw added Snow Goose and Northern Shoveler at Shannon Springs Park in Grady County; and Zach Poland recognized Pileated Woodpecker, American Pipit, and Cedar Waxwing at Liberty Lake in Logan County. On the 26th Larry Mays viewed Wilson's Snipe, Sharp-shinned Hawk and American Pipit at South Lakes Park in Cleveland County; and Bill Diffin found Lesser Black-backed Gull and Forster's Tern at Lake Hefner Lighthouse Area. On the 27th John Hurd observed Northern Flicker at Dolese Youth Park in OKC. On the 28th Calvin Rees identified Ferruginous Hawk, Horned Grebe and Greater Scaup at Rose Lake; and Deb Hirt reported Ruddy Duck and Bewick's Wren at Boomer Lake Park. Next are the Christmas Bird Counts. How many species can be found in one day in each count circle?

During November of 2018 in the Central Oklahoma area **140** species were reported with **4** new species bringing the total for the year to **278**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds. Information is accessed at: [ebird](http://www.ebird.org). 2018 eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <http://www.ebird.org>. (Accessed: November 30, 2018). And occasionally from Facebook and the OKBIRDS List. I can be contacted by e-mail at emkok@earthlink.net. Esther M. Key, Editor.

Field Trip Report: Martin Park

On Saturday, December 1, a morning bird walk was held at Martin Nature Park Nature Center. We met at 7:30 a.m. in hopes of getting out early enough to perhaps spot some owls. Betz Hacker and I had hoped for a good turnout and offered "bagels with cream cheese and coffee." I had only 3 folks call, so I was concerned. Perhaps we will get 3-4 more. WELL 22 BIRDERS ARRIVED!

It was cold and overcast, so the bagels and coffee were welcomed by all. What a crowd!

With several great birders in the group; Bill Diffin, Neil Garrison, Brian Marra, Gracie Hoffman and others, we decided to split into 3 groups. We first walked both sides of the creek, checking all the big trees for the Great Horned Owls reported by the park personnel. No luck on owls, but managed several small birds. All of us eventually birded all the looped paths (A, B, C as well as the center) at different times hoping to get what the other group missed.

We had 33 sightings but no owls! The total group list included most of the common winter birds otherwise, except brown creepers. The better sightings were: Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, Eastern Phoebe, Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Song Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Flicker, Spotted Towhee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Sharp-shinned, Red-tailed and Red shouldered Hawks, and Red-winged Blackbirds.



Back at the parking lot around 11 AM, while preparing to leave, a mature Bald Eagle flew in from the west and perched in one of the largest trees bordering the park pond. Everyone got great looks. Then the eagle flew down and grabbed a foot long fish from the pond, returned to a perch in another large tree in total view of all. It proceeded to eat the fish, and then flew off in the direction of Lake Hefner.

We took that as a great sign and good omen that we had done well!

Hal A. Yocum, group leader

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