



the Fledgling

Vol. 18, No. 2, Dec, 2000 - Feb, 2001

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Joseph Kern

Biophilia v Anthropocentrism

Much to our pleasure, the SAAS general meetings held at the Crandall Library, from 7 A.M. to 9 P.M. every fourth Wednesday have been, "transmogrified." We have had previously, an attendance of nine or ten to perhaps fifteen. The last three general presentations have generated an audience in the forties and fifties.

What is this saying, or, how would you interpret this change?

Naturally, one could easily ascribe the increased interest and turnout to the well known, highly respected presenters, and one would be completely correct. I would love to go into greater detail here but that would require an entire article. Perhaps another time.

As president of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Chapter I will allow myself the privilege of considering another factor to be a strong influence here: 'Biophilia.'

This new word, not yet found even in the most up to date and unabridged dictionaries has a simple and, I think, a most timely meaning. It asserts the need within the human spirit and soul to have a profound connection to Nature.

I ask myself, and I hope that you also ask yourself: is it time, finally, to recognize the unquestionable connection between Human life and All other life? Is it appropriate, even vital, that we begin to make choices which take into consideration the health and well being of the whole planet? Shouldn't that include All other life forms, even if only to maintain our own health and well being?

(Continued on page 2)

2001 CALENDAR

Marion Cole

Monthly chapter meetings are held at the Crandall Library, on the fourth Wednesday of the month, except as noted below. For bi/monthly changes and updates, please check this column in each issue. Mark your calendar and join us for some exciting presentations by guest speakers featured below. Guests are welcome. Bring one with you!

THE MEETINGS WILL START PROMPTLY AT 7PM.
PLEASE BE ON TIME.

January 24	Lisa Fuller, herbalist Planting a Medicinal Garden
February 28	John Schneider Birds of Antarctica & Galapagos
March 28	Bruce Cole Adirondack Historical Travelogue
April 25	Mike Berger, National Audubon Wintering Birds and Forest Biodiversity
May 23	TBA
June 27	Linda Theiss Review of Maine's Environmental Camp



FROM THE PRESIDENT

(cont'd from page 1)

'Anthropocentrism,'

a very old word. Dictionary meaning: Assuming man as the center or ultimate end.

Without my writing a thesis, can you see how one of these philosophies (anthropocentrism) may have been contributory to the problems, that have plagued human history? Can you contemplate that at the same time the other very real and breathing instinct, biophilia, may be the solution, or at least the starting point of the healing process so important at this moment?

Naturally, you have the total freedom to see the health of the planet or any part of same, to not be in danger and threatened by human activity.

I ask only that you look around at the many diverse sources of information concerning this topic. From my vantage point, I see enough to at least take this issue seriously. We have volumes of solid scientific data at this time to know with certainty that there is a leak in the boat. Do we want to wait until the leak becomes too big to fix, or should we begin now to thoughtfully repair the damage?

Although the word, "bird," or anything directly pertaining to ornithology did not appear even once in this communication, rest assured that birds, wildlife, habitat and all that Audubon stands for is here in what I have written, and is what this article is all about.

Either directly or indirectly, you have been showing me your interest in this theme, by your overwhelming attendance at our general meetings. We work hard to make them available to you. In exchange we would like to ask you to consider greater participation now and in the near future in Audubon's diverse array of already well established programs, and also some new National Audubon efforts. They are all designed to keep the boat afloat.

Please feel free to call, Email or write me or any board member with questions, answers, ideas, stories, anything! All necessary information is on the back of the Fledgling.



EDITOR'S CORNER

Ewa Hammer

Although due to work related travel I was unable to attend the last two chapter meetings, I was delighted to hear that the hall was filled with forty or more participants. I hope those who attended and enjoyed the excellent presentations scheduled by SAAS have been motivated to join, if they are not yet members. If you brought guests, friends or relatives to a meeting, consider Claire Hunter's suggestion of giving them a gift membership this holiday season. They may not only enjoy the presentations and the Fledgling, but become enthusiastic enough to subscribe on their own next year, perhaps, even become active participants.

I do hope that you all enjoyed the presentations, but I have no way of knowing for sure as no one has sent me any comments or feedback as requested in the last issue. I am a bit disappointed that there is no 'Letters to the Editor' column as promised, but it is hard to have one without any letters. The next issue of the Fledgling is scheduled for March. Please e-mail me questions, comments, complaints, suggestions. They don't have to be complicated, long or formal. Just a note will do. If you indicate you don't want your name used, we will preserve your privacy. Your thoughts, ideas and input matter to us. Do you like the Backyard Habitat series? Would you like book reviews? We can only guess unless you tell us. Please communicate. The address is on the back page.

In his column, our president raises the important issue of our relationship to nature. He urges us to do something constructive for our planet and suggests more involvement with Audubon programs as a means of doing this. In this issue we provide you with information on FeederWatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count, two such programs which could benefit from your involvement, and which, I hope, you will seriously consider supporting.

In this season of thanksgiving, I wish to express my gratitude to the invisible workers who make the Fledgling a reality. Two couples work hard behind the scenes to get each issue to your mailbox. Barb Putnam, who also helps me whenever I need help which is often, updates the newsletter list each month and prints it just before the Fledgling comes out - sorted by zip code. Her husband puts the labels on the newsletters and transports them to the Eustances. Mary and John count the number in each zip code and rubber band them together, before taking the newsletters to the post office. It's a lot of time and work. Thank you.

Last but not least, I wish to thank Claire Hunter for her thoughtfulness and consideration. She truly shows her caring by remembering all the small details that matter. Thank you, Claire, for always getting your copy in early, which makes my life as editor easier. Thank you for reminding me to thank others. And most of all thank you for your sunny, cheerful enthusiasm which brightens my day.

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT NEEDS EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE TO COUNT FOR THE BIRDS

From National Audubon press release

It is well known that many bird species are showing population declines due to habitat loss or other human impacts. Now, people of all ages and backgrounds can help monitor bird populations-including several that are showing declines-by participating in the 4th annual Great Backyard Bird Count February, February 16-19, 2001.

A project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society with funding provided in part by Wild Birds Unlimited and Ford Motor Company, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) combines high-tech web tools with 'citizen science' observation of birds.

Begun in 1998, the GBBC has engaged more than 1000,000 people of all ages and skill levels in the effort to keep common birds common. "We're asking everyone, everywhere in North America to take a few minutes to tell us what birds they see on any or all of the count days," says John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "By tracking changes in bird distribution and abundance over time, such a vast database can serve as the S.O.S. signal for species that may be in trouble.

This is especially important for species that are already showing population declines. GBBC 2001 will put the spotlight on quail, a frequent backyard visitor, familiar to many outdoor enthusiasts in the U.S. and Canada. "Few people are aware that some species, including Northern Bobwhite in the East and Scaled Quail in the Southwest, are experiencing severe population declines," says Frank Gill, National Audubon's senior vice president for science. "Because quail are relatively easy to identify, even the casual observer can play an important role in helping them by participating in the GBBC.

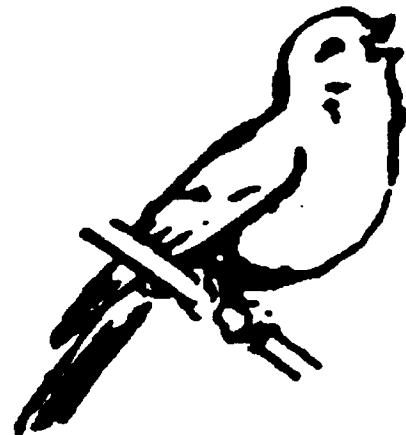
Audubon and Cornell Lab are also asking participants to pay special attention to several species of woodpecker, including the Red-headed Woodpecker and the Northern Flicker, which are also showing signs of serious population decreases.

Because the GBBC charts findings in real time, scientists have already made connections between weather patterns and bird movements. For the last few years, American Robin appeared farther north than typically expected, in areas where snow cover was scant or non-existent. Such a correlation may be suggestive of global warming or other broad scale weather changes. This year's GBBC will again collect information about snow depth.

To participate in the GBBC, count the highest number of each bird species seen at one time (to ensure the birds are not counted more than once) and keep track of the amount of time spent counting. Log onto Birdsource at www.birdsource.org to enter your observations. Results are updated hourly.

The GBBC web site also includes useful information to make participation easy and enjoyable. There is a vocabulary section, bird watching and bird feeding tips, bird vocalizations, and more, including information about House Finch eye disease. For those tired of winter and ready for spring, there will be tips about planning and preparing for the spring bird garden.

Instructions for participating can be found at www.birdsource.org by clicking on Great Backyard Bird Count. There's no fee or registration. Those who would like to participate but aren't online can try their local library. Many Wild Bird Unlimited locations also accept reports. Libraries, businesses, nature clubs, Scout troops and other community organizations interested in promoting the GBBC or getting involved can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at 800-843-2473, or the National Audubon Society at 212-979-3083.



BIRD-FEEDING ENTHUSIASTS AND CORNELL RESEARCHERS TRACK CHANGES IN FEEDER BIRD POPULATIONS

From Cornell Lab of Ornithology press release

Last winter was the warmest on record in 105 years. What did this mean for the birds? A continentwide network of "citizen scientists" helped researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology find out. Now they're gearing up to find out what the birds will tell them this winter.

These "citizen scientists" are participating in Project FeederWatch, a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders throughout North America, sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with Bird Studies Canada, National Audubon, and the Canadian Nature Federation. Started in 1987, the project has grown to more than 15,000 participants in the United States and Canada.

This year's summary of results contrasted bird abundances in the winter of 1999-2000 with the prior winter. Last winter, "FeederWatchers" reported an increase in "irruptive" species (birds that typically spend the winter in the North but periodically "irrupt" into more southerly regions, probably in response to low food availability farther north) east of the Rockies. Common Redpolls appeared in larger-than-average numbers—larger than in any winter since 1994. They were especially abundant in a band stretching from the Northern Rockies to the North Atlantic region. FeederWatch data also show that Northern Shrikes invaded feeding stations across the northern tier last winter. Nicknamed "butcher birds" for their technique of impaling their prey on thorns and branches, shrikes showed up at many feeding stations to catch songbirds, presumably because of lower numbers of small rodents in the fields where they typically hunt. Last winter's FeederWatch data also indicated a scarcity in ground-feeding birds such as Harris's Sparrows. The lower abundances were especially notable in the Mid- and South-Central regions, where it may be related to drought. Most ground-feeding species rely on seeds produced by smaller plants (grasses and forbes); production of these seeds can be easily affected by rainfall or a lack of it.

FeederWatchers have helped make some interesting discoveries based on the long-term data. Findings published in the *Canadian Journal of Zoology* documented for the first time the cyclical changes in Varied Thrush abundance. FeederWatch data revealed that, on average, this species peaks in abundance every second year, perhaps in response to acorn availability in winter. Another discovery appeared in *The Condor*, a scientific journal published

by the Cooper Ornithological Society. The data showed that although the Common Redpoll is an irruptive migrant probably forced south by lack of food, the redpolls' movements are like those of any other winter migrant when the birds irrupt southward. Findings such as these help scientists better understand the lives of bird species that would otherwise be a mystery because they live far to the north, in regions not typically covered by other monitoring programs.

FeederWatchers also play a critical role in tracking outbreaks of avian diseases. In 1994, Cornell Lab researchers asked FeederWatchers to help track the spread of a disease previously almost unknown in wild birds. This disease, called mycoplasmal conjunctivitis (often referred to as House Finch eye disease because it primarily hits House Finches) is manifested by symptoms including swollen, crusty eyes, which frequently lead to blindness and eventually death as the birds are caught by predators or eventually starve. In the prestigious *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Lab researchers recently published a landmark paper about how this disease may have become the main factor regulating the abundance of House Finches. Starting this winter, Lab researchers are asking FeederWatchers to help with a newly expanded House Finch Disease Survey through which they hope to learn whether the disease has successfully crossed the Great Plains and started to infect House Finches in western North America.

"FeederWatchers are the eyes and ears for scientists studying North American feeder bird populations," says Wesley Hochachka, assistant director of the Cornell Lab's Bird Population Studies program and a coauthor of many FeederWatch-related scientific papers. "There's simply no other way to acquire data about continentwide populations throughout the entire winter. These data are critical in helping us understand both long- and short-term changes in bird populations and their environments."

One reason Project FeederWatch has been so successful is because it was designed with all of that in mind. "FeederWatch undergoes continuous evaluation and refinement by our staff scientists, some of whom are leaders in their fields," says Laura Kammermeier, FeederWatch project leader. "The materials are developed to educate participants before they even begin, and (Continued on page 6)

CAN WE AFFORD TO BE COMPLACENT?

Ewa Hammer

In his column, 'From the President', Joseph Kern poses this serious question: are humans truly the center of the universe, the only ones that matter, superior to all and, thereby entitled to use and abuse those perceived as less important to serve their own desires? Or, do we have an often unrecognized or ignored need to connect more deeply, more respectfully and in a more caring fashion with all of nature? Joseph suggests we do have that need, that ignoring it has caused much destruction of the planet, which is our home, and that we need to do something now, before it is too late, to reverse this downward spiral. He asks that we get more involved in the efforts of Audubon to save the planet.

It is easy to dismiss Joseph as a prophet of gloom and doom. After all, many people have been issuing dire warnings (remember Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*?), but the birds are still singing and the world does not appear in danger of imminent collapse. While is all true, there are serious danger signs, red flags that we ignore at our risk. Thousands of living species become extinct every year, many of them never even studied or encountered by man. Some people are concerned that this loss means the loss of valuable medical or other resources, others believe we can adapt without them. The fact is, we don't know. What we do know is that all animal species exist within an ecosystem and not in isolation. That is why preserving habitat is so essential. We don't really know which, or how many other species are essential to our human habitat, to our survival as a species. Physics tells us that there is such a thing as critical mass. In other words, once things get to a certain point the direction becomes irreversible, the downward spiral cannot be stopped. So can we afford to be complacent? Is it not prudent, possibly critical to address the first symptoms of a serious illness rather than waiting to see if it becomes life threatening?

There is another concern in all of this. According to many cultural and religious traditions, we are the stewards of nature. Our ancestors (with some exceptions) have often interpreted this to mean that all of nature has been created solely for our benefit, and that this gives us the right to use it without any consideration of its needs. For the most part, this is how we have proceeded and continue to proceed. Forests have been clear-cut all over the world to serve our need for lumber. Huge areas have been destroyed by strip mining, to give us coal. Land and water has been poisoned by chemicals and toxic waste. Air has been polluted by the same. Farmlands have been destroyed by development. Fisheries have been destroyed by oil spills and over-fishing. All of this has caused critical

loss of habitat for wild species leading to the alarming extinction rates. Treatment, by the factory farm system, of the animals we eat is extremely cruel. We tolerate all this suffering and destruction in the belief that it is to our benefit. But is it really?

Leaving aside for a moment, the issue of our survival, let us look at our level of happiness. Are we, living in the capital of world consumption and wealth, truly content or happy with all we have amassed? I think it fair to say we are not. Disaffection, alienation and despair as evidenced by the high rates of violence and suicide and even higher numbers of people suffering from depression, sleep disorders and anxiety taking record amounts of drugs to numb their psychic pain, do not indicate a healthy, happy nation. Is it possible that the way we live and relate to our natural environment has some bearing here?

Is it possible that stewardship implies responsibility rather than just privilege? That as stewards we have an obligation to ensure the safety of those placed in our care? The level and amount of care required can be argued by people of good conscience, but is not ensuring the survival of all and elimination of cruelty a minimum standard we must strive for?

Life without inner peace and contentment can become meaningless, lonely and extremely painful. People leave their comfortable homes by the millions each year in search of an inner experience in the few wilderness areas left. Every summer, national and state parks are overcrowded with tourists and still they come. What are they searching for? Is there a deep need of the human spirit to connect with nature in its wild state? Is wilderness and the wild creatures that inhabit it a wellspring of renewal for our souls? If this is so, then we must wake from our complacency and do something to save ourselves as well as the rest of nature — before it is too late.



BUILDING BACKYARDS FOR FEATHERED FRIENDS

Ewa Hammer

It is amazing how easy it is to attract birds and provide them with an attractive and safe haven. Last time, we visited a small, suburban backyard in Queensbury, which abounded with feathered friends and other fauna. This time we shall explore a larger piece of land, situated in the town of Indian Lake, more wild and less populated than the first one.

The owners have designed their house with large windows in the rear, affording them a great view of the backyard and its centerpiece, a lovely wild pond. They made, I believe, an excellent landscaping decision to cultivate local species and resist importing ones foreign to the area. As a result, their property is filled with healthy, vigorous flora, which provides shelter and habitat for numerous birds and other animals. It also provides another necessity: clean and accessible water.

The house is situated in a wooded area with a small lawn in front and rear. The pond sits directly behind the grassy area, close enough to the house for good visibility even without binoculars. The front of the property is bordered by a rambling brook.

As in the Queensbury yard, the vegetation is varied and serves the needs of different species. The garden starts with a mowed area of grass and moves to higher plants such as thistle, wild strawberry and raspberry, chickory, mint, yarrow, burdock, mullein and pennyroyal. There are also more bushy ones, such as wild roses and high burst cranberry. Elm, apple, balsam and tamarack trees together with birch and cedar create a tall boundary which soon becomes a wild forest. Pond and day lillies float on the surface of the pond.

It is not surprising that such an inviting place would boast many wild inhabitants and visitors. Besides the common to the area deer, bear, snakes, shrews and bats, less visible species like fox, mink, fisher and moose have been observed. The pond attracts beaver, otter, and muskrat, as well as housing its usual occupants, the newts, fish, frogs, toads and turtles. But best of all, it attracts water birds and ducks, including the spectacular wood duck.



The following impressive list of birds spotted on the property was provided by the owner.

VISITORS TO INDIAN LAKE BACKYARD

Canadian Geese	Kingfishers
Wood Ducks	Blue jays
Pintail Ducks	Crows, Ravens
Mergansers	Blue Birds
Golden Eye	Chickadees
Mallards	Brown Creepers
Blue and Green Heron	Osprey
Owls	Hummingbirds
Flickers	Robins
Woodpeckers	Loons
Plovers	Swallows
Hawks	Nuthatches
Sparrows Warblers	Phoebes
Killdeer	Cowbirds

BIRD-FEEDING ENTHUSIASTS AND CORNELL RESEARCHERS TRACK CHANGES IN FEEDER BIRD POPULATIONS

(Continued from page 5)

the data forms are carefully developed to prevent reporting errors and identification mistakes."

Another reason why the project is a success, says Kammermeier, is because it's enjoyable, and participants learn a lot about the birds they so enjoy. "Although the protocol is scientifically rigorous, we've made it very easy for people of all ages, backgrounds, and skill levels to participate," she says. Many home schoolers use FeederWatch as an educational tool, and nature centers and bird clubs find that it is a great outreach vehicle.

Each fall, FeederWatchers await with great anticipation the unveiling of the "FeederWatch Top-10 List," the 10 most frequently reported species in North America. This year's list reads as follows: 10) House Sparrow, seen at 58 percent of feeders; 9) White-breasted Nuthatch, 65 percent of feeders—and a new Top-10 List species; 8) Black-capped Chickadee, 66 percent; 7) Northern Cardinal, 69 percent; 6) American Goldfinch, 72 percent; 5) and 4) House Finch and Blue Jay, both reported at 74 percent of feeders; 3) Downy Woodpecker, 75 percent; 2) Mourning Dove, 80 percent, and the species most frequently reported by FeederWatchers is; 1) Dark-eyed Junco, seen at 85 percent of FeederWatch feeders.

To sign up for Project FeederWatch, call the Cornell Lab at 800/843-2473 in the United States (in Canada, call Bird Studies Canada at 888/448-2473.) Sign up over the Web at <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>. To sign up by check, send to PFW/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, P.O. Box 11 Ithaca, NY 14850.

Because the Lab is a nonprofit organization, there is a \$15 fee to help defray costs of the study.

ELDERHOSTEL REPORT

by Joan Robertson

Southern Adirondack Audubon recently completed a program of teaching at Garnet Hill Lodge in North River. This is a fund raising project that allows us to send children/adults to Environmental Camps. We are one of the sponsors of the program and have been teaching classes since October of 1994.

For this session the students came from 11 states, including CA, TX, MD. Linda White and I really enjoyed this enthusiastic group. They were personable, eager to learn, and very impressed with the beauty of the Adirondack Region. Our lectures were about Autumn Birding in the Adirondacks, focusing on the migratory and residential species. We also used Carl Heilman's new video, which was much appreciated since we were kept inside part of the time by rain. These classes are an important part of our outreach programs in the community. We emphasize respect for the environment and conservation of natural resources. If you would like to be a part of this please let one of the board members know of your interest.

At this time, I wish to step down as Chapter Coordinator and it is essential that someone step in to fill the vacancy. There are several lectures ready and available and a large collection of slides so it would not be starting from ground zero. I will teach as I am able but can no longer be responsible for the organization duties. It is really fun - like a mini-vacation. Please volunteer! Call me for the job description.

IN MEMORIAM

Contributed by Joan Robertson

Kathryn O'Keefe, a charter member of SAAS, died in September 2000. She was one of our most loyal followers and was quick to support all of the programs. She regularly attended the meetings as she was able, contributed generously to the Adirondack Adventure classes at St. Mary's, was an enthusiastic participant in the field trips, particularly the mid-week ones when we roamed far and wide.

She was a graduate of Cornell Ornithological Institute, and continued her interest in Birding and Conservation throughout her life. Her travels allowed her to seek out exotic species in many countries, as well as doing extensive birding in and around Glens Falls and the Adirondacks. Judging from the avian activity near her homes in Glens Falls and Assembly Point these feathered friends recognized her as a true environmentalist and her yard as a safe haven.

We'll miss your gentleness and quiet ways, Katherine. I, in particular, who spent many happy hours in your company will miss your humor, your vast knowledge and your eagerness to share your experiences.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

Claire Hunter



WELCOME to the first SAAS recruited member for the current year: Janet McAvoy from Wilton!

Welcome also to the 71 new members assigned to us by National Audubon. Renewing membership are 49 special people whose support is the grassroots base of our chapter.

AUTUMN 2000 MEMBERSHIP PROMOTION

December is the last reward month during which chapters will receive DOUBLE the usual dues share. A special code is required. Send your applications and checks to me. I'll be a happy coder.

An Audubon membership is a great gift choice. Dues include membership in National and SAAS as well as subscriptions to Audubon magazine and the Fledgling. You can get a free backpack as a special bonus, if you hurry. A gift card is provided by SAAS as well as a suncatcher for anyone requesting it. A few years ago a grandfather picked up a membership card on Christmas Eve -- for his grandson. We will try to accommodate.

RENEWALS are sent to the national office in Colorado. Processing is speeded up if you include a copy of the bill. If you do not have a bill handy, send your check to me and I'll see that it matches the Colorado list.

MEMBER NEWS

Kathleen Bond, who hosted many bird and wildflower walks at her Greenwich home, has moved to Pennsylvania. She has the same internet address for corresponding with her birding friends. Kathleen is part of a team checking on birds that come to Longwood Gardens in West Chester, Pa. Dream work!

CHAPTER COMMUNICATION

A list of meetings for the year was featured on the first page of the Fall Fledgling. Many members have told me they appreciate having the schedule.

About eight members called this month with membership and renewal inquiries. It was a pleasure to talk with these callers. Of course, birds were also mentioned. Call me about any renewal problems.

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society

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Linda Theis	793-4557

2000-2003

Marion A. Cole	743-9631
Ginny Vogel	584-3936

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the National Audubon Society and Southern Adirondack Audubon includes the bimonthly magazine **Audubon** and SAAS newsletter, **The Fledgling**. The cost is \$20 for regular memberships and \$15 for seniors. Make checks payable to "National Audubon Society" and send with name/address/phone number to: Claire Hunter, 3 Edgewood Drive, PO Box 1382, South Glens Falls, NY 12803-1382. Please note: National Audubon does not recognize chapter only memberships.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____



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