New Hope Audubon Society Newsletter



Volume 33, Number 2: March-April 2007



Conservation Corner – Eno River by Joanna Hiller

In the first of two previous newsletters, we saw statistics demonstrating that millions of visitors and North Carolinians alike frequent North Carolina's natural areas. In the last newsletter, we discussed Jordan Lake and looked at its many attributes. In this newsletter, I would like to look at another ever growing and widely popular area, the Eno River. A popular North Carolina destination for hiking, fishing, and canoeing, the Eno River is a 33 mile swift, shallow stream that flows from northwest Orange County into Durham County where it joins the Flat River to become the Neuse River and flows into Falls Lake. The walls of the river are narrow and steep, with a rugged landscape that is sculpted by swift flowing water. The Eno River State Park lies there, in the midst of 3900 acres of natural resources.

The park has 5 accesses: Cabe Lands, Cole Mill, Few's Ford, Pleasant Green, and Pump Station. These offer entry into this largely unspoiled environment.

The Eno River is home to the endangered Panhandle Pebble Snail - a tiny mollusk the size of a pencil tip. Although the snail is still plentiful in the Eno, the snail is at risk because it feeds solely on the riffleweed (Postostemum, Ceratophyllum Michx.). This riverweed dies if the is no water flowing over the rocks. As Dave Cook, manager of the Eno River State Park states: "If the riffleweed dies, the panhandle snail dies."

The Eno is also home to five species of rare birds and three species of rare fish. As well, eight of the ten mussel species found in its waters are either threatened or endangered – primarily due to sediment pollution from nearby development. Razing land for new developments causes the areas red soil to be washed into the river during rains. This soil then settles on the river bottom-feeding mussels and suffocates them. Filter feeders, mussels are important for cleaning our water systems.

A significant advocate for the conservation and protection of the Eno River system is the Eno River Association. A nearly 40-year-old grass roots organization, it has worked tirelessly to help protect natural and open space lands throughout the Eno River Basin. The organization has raised money through various functions, such as the Eno River Festival, to continually increase park space through land acquisitions in conjunction with the Nature Conservancy. The latter is an organization, which enabled landowners and others to get tax credits for donations. In recent years, the Eno River Association has turned to protecting land deeper in the Eno River's watershed. As indicated in my discussion of Jordan Lake, this river also faces pollution from careless development that allows runoff to spill into it and destroy its eco system.

Fortunately, North Carolina has strong laws on the books that allow government officials to preserve and protect unspoiled waters. In order to continue to enjoy this and other North Carolinian rivers, lakes and streams, it is important for us to contact our legislators and let them know that we want them to uphold the rules that will protect all of the rivers in the state's most unspoiled but threatened areas - such as the Eno River. When developers build, none of our rivers, lakes or streams should be ruined in the process. The Environmental Management Commission recently adopted new rules to guard against polluted runoff, it will be important for the NC General Assembly to protect these new standards.

The New Hope Audubon is highly supportive of conservation efforts along the Eno River.

If you wish to be a part of this effort, please consider joining us in our

Eno River Bottomlands Important Bird Area(IBA) work and contact Tom Driscoll for more information.

A Birding Adventure in the Pocosin

January 13-15, 2007 • Phil Bushnell

When you ask people in Hyde County about hunting, they talk about the pocosin. Turns out that pocosin means both 'swamp' and 'dismal', which may explain the 'Great Dismal Swamp' that you see on county maps, and it sure must have been dismal for the first explorers, because it is flat submerged land covered with thickets and struggling stands of long-leaf pine and sweet gum.

Nowadays, much of the pocosin has been drained and cleared, and yields corn, soybean, and winter wheat crops that arctic birds prefer to the sea oats that supported them during their prehistoric winters in the survivable winters of the mid-Atlantic region. These fields, along with the large, shallow lakes of the pocosin, attract huge flocks of waterfowl that drew us to Lake Mattamuskeet for some eagerly anticipated birding.

New and inexperienced, we had little idea what to expect at Lake Mattamuskeet, but a few websites and advice from friends helped prepare us for the trip. We had good binoculars, but were told that a spotting scope was essential, given the distances kept by the birds from eager human watchers. Turns out, the more scopes the better, as long as you don't have to carry them far from the car. Not only do they make those blurry distant birds more distinct, they make you look really important!

On our entrance to the Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge off the Hwy 94 causeway that crosses the lake, we were greeted by an excitable patrol of American coots in the narrow canal north of the gravel road. They turned out to be the most abundantly visible bird in the county (followed closely by the robin), evident in ditches, submerged woodland, and grassy wetlands. Across the road to the southwest stretched an expanse of water that looked large but turned out to be a minuscule section of the whole lake. However, it was replete with birds, the most obvious of which was the white tundra swan, with its 6-foot wingspan, black beak and feet, and continuous chorus of hoots and hollers. Groups taking off clapped the water with surprising volume, often interrupting conversations on the roadway.

Continued on page 3.

WILDATHON 2007

Tom Driscoll and Marsha Stephens will co-chair this year's Wildathon which is one of NHAS's major annual fund raising events for conservation and protection of habitat. Beginning in mid to late April and running through mid May, teams count species (birds, plants, reptiles or any other) for a 24 hour period, and ask that supporters make pledges for their efforts. The pledge form is included in this newsletter. If you would like to contribute, be a team leader or member, or otherwise participate, please contact either Tom or Marsha. The ways in many choose to participate are:

- **1. Make a financial contribution.** Contributing is one of the best ways to protect important bird and wildlife habitat here in Chapel Hill (Mason Farm) and at the Coast (Audubon Coast Islands Sanctuary).
- **2. Lead a team and/or join a team.** The Wildathon is a day in April or May where teams go out to identify and, more importantly, count bird, plant, reptile and amphibian, insect, and/or other species. Usually, donations are based on the number of species counted. You do not have to be experienced to be on a team.
- **3. Help bring in donations.** Beyond making a donation yourself, participants can help raise money by soliciting donations on behalf of their team.
- **4. Help with publicity.** Bring your creative energy for making posters, fliers or otherwise getting the word out for support of the Wildathon 2007.

Contributions are **tax deductible** and your participation will be **noted in our bi-monthly newsletter and on our website** (www.newhopeaudubon.org).

Please consult our website (www.newhopeaudubon.org) for a full listing of the New Hope Audubon Society's spring schedule of events, including field trips, programs, and fair and festival participation.

The sun was behind the scene in the afternoon, limiting most viewing to silhouettes. Even so, we could make out Canada geese floating unobtrusively amongst the swans, and a variety of ducks patrolling the grasses nearer to shore, among which we identified mallards, northern shovelers and pintails. Great egrets occasionally fluttered into the more distant grasses, and turkey vultures and a bald eagle soared overhead. Nutria ambled down the bank to the water and went about munching in the muck. A belted kingfisher flitted among the trees behind us, and an unending line of blackbirds flew westward across the distant treetops as the setting sun lit up the sky.

Next morning, we went to the Pungo Lake in the Pocosin National Wildlife Refuge observation area. Pungo is much smaller than Mattamuskeet, but still large enough that individual trees on the opposite shore are indistinguishable without binoculars. Getting there was an adventure in itself, as the available maps provide a vague representation of reality, on which distances appear much shorter than

they actually are. Directional signs were designed by minimalists, and the roads are in fact packed sand in arrow-straight tracks that disappear to the vanishing point ahead and behind. Nor is the absolutely flat landscape reassuring to those of us accustomed to occasional inclines. Turning off Hwy 45 north of Ponzer, the roads run a couple of feet above the water in the ditches alongside; as you approach (by a zigzag route called the Charles Kuralt Trail), you find after turning a corner that now the water is a couple of inches below the road, though the road has

find after turning a corner that now the water is a couple of inches below the road, though the road has not changed elevation at all. Hmm.

Nevertheless, perseverance furthered: following the prevalent tire tracks in the sand brought us to a sturdy and spacious observation deck on the south shore of Pungo Lake. A clear bright sky, the northern view, and a fresh southern breeze made the viewing spectacular. Yesterday's tundra swans were again plentiful, along with flotillas of Canada geese and distant, indistinct brownish splotches of ducks, camouflaged by the thermal haze floating on the water. On the observation deck, we were also entertained by song sparrows, redwing blackbirds,

grackles, robins, a northern harrier, a belted kingfisher, and soaring red-tailed hawks and black vultures.

A puzzlingly bright white line far across the northern lobe of the lake, first thought to be a beach, then a shoal of clam shells, eventually revealed itself to be a mass of thousands of snow geese, when a FWS spotting plane stirred them up into a living cloud. They rose in a swarm that moved first left, then right, collecting stragglers still floating on the water into an innumerable, flapping mass. The scope revealed the blackness of their primaries, the mark that distinguishes them at a distance from the all-white swans. The cloud rose, swirled, sank and rose again repeatedly as the birds sought a new order from the seeming chaos of the flight, eventually settling back to a bright white line far across the lake. One presumes the oblique angle of view turned a somewhat circular flotilla into that line, but none of us had a periscope tall enough to tell. A biologist taking data for the Navy reported that the population of geese wintering in the area had been estimated at about 80,000, with about a quarter of them in that flock.¹

That same biologist helpfully showed us an aerial photograph of the area and pointed out some impoundments to the west where waterfowl could likely be seen at closer range. We drove slowly the mile or so that direction, noting a pair of mallards, a semi-submerged anhinga, and a pie-billed grebe in the ditches along the way. As we pulled up to watch, the nervous grebe miraculously sank into the water, not diving as other ducks we've seen, but descended out of sight tail first. Further on, a lone swan sat on a hummock across the ditch from the road, and moved only its head when we approached. Could it have been injured or sick?

The impoundments were awash with coots that skittered away into the grasses as we approached. We set up to view a couple dozen birds across the impoundment to the east. Tundra swans, a few snow geese, with their black feathers and yellow bills now visible, and a collection of ducks rested comfortably in the lee of grass. Patience and the powerful scope revealed northern shovelers, an anhinga, mallards, pintails and, most exciting to us, green-winged teals.

Finally, our time and necks spent from hefting all that glass, we packed up to leave. On the way out, we saw some swans and geese feeding in one of the fields of winter wheat that the farmers extract from the former pocosin. Three hours later, we were back in Chapel Hill listening to the wrens scolding us for returning so soon.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is one reader's report on his favorite spot to find birds. Do you have a favorite spot you would like to share? If so please contact me at photopr@yahoo.com with your contribution.

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A Triangle Naturalist's Almanac



by Patrick Coin

Golden Net-wing – a spark in the woods

Butterfly-watchers know that early spring is their only chance to see certain butterflies, such as the Falcate Orange-tip. Beetle-watchers, too, seek a few "spring ephemerals". Most notable of these is the Golden Net-wing, *Dictyopterus aurora*. The

genus name is from two Greek words, meaning "net-winged". The species name *aurora* alludes to the Roman goddess of dawn, referring, no doubt, to the beetle's color. Though just 10 mm long, it is easy to spot in flight. With its reddish-orange elytra (wing covers), it resembles a glowing cinder drifting through the woods.

The Golden Net-wing is a member of the Lycidae, or net-winged beetles. This is a small family, with only 83 species in North America. What the lycids lack in diversity, they make up for in notoriety – they are usually brightly-colored with orange and black. The dense pattern of veins on the elytra is distinctive as well. As in many groups of insects, the bright colors are *aposematic*, warning vertebrate predators of chemical defenses. The Golden Net-wing is apparently no exception, for one I captured in flight exuded a strong odor.

The Golden Net-wing is associated with woodlands, especially those with downed logs. The larvae are presumed to feed on rotting wood or on other insects. Adults appear briefly in early spring, and are no doubt seeking mates. A few are reported in late fall, indicating that the beetles pass the winter in the adult stage. The beetle's habitat requirements must not be too narrow, for it is found across much of North America and in Eurasia as well. Locally, look for the Golden Net-wing in deciduous and mixed woodlands during March. I have seen them in small woodlots in Durham, as well as in large tracts of forest. For more information on this species, see **bugguide.net**.

Feeder Watch

by Tom Driscoll

You should be receiving this newsletter in mid-February. This is often the coldest part of the year. Birds should be feeding greedily from your feeders. Are you putting out more feed? Often, birds, such as Brown Thrashers, Pine Warblers, Baltimore Orioles, and Eastern Bluebirds feed on suet during February. The winter visitors, migrants from the north, will usually remain through February, March, and some through April.

During the winter, we have visitors from the north and/or the mountains. Have you noticed slate-gray black birds with pink bills and white outer tail feathers? These birds are named Dark-

eyed Juncos and are part of the sparrow family. White-throated Sparrows are often common feeder birds at platform feeders or picking up the "leftovers" on the grounds. There are several plumage forms of this sparrow, but all have white throats. Another winter visitor is the Red-breasted Nuthatch. These birds look like our White-breasted Nuthatch, but have red breasts and a white stripe through the eyes. We also have Purple Finches occasionally during some winters. These birds are bigger than their cousins, the House Finch. They can be difficult to tell apart. The Purple Finch usually has more purple in its plumage. Also, the upper bill, called the culmen, is straight whereas the House Finch has a curved culmen. If you hear a buzzing, then you may have Pine Siskins. They are small streaked birds with some yellow on the wings and eat seeds, especially thistle or niger (also spelled as nyjer).

If you don't recognize these birds or the bird names, then may I suggest you pick one a bird guide that are available in many stores. I challenge you to learn the names and calls of your feeder birds! Please let me know if you do. If you have questions or notice an unusual bird, then please contact me.

Also, some birds, such as the Eastern Bluebird, will start pairing up to mate in March, so it is time to clean out your bluebird boxes or houses or make sure your bluebird boxes are up. Clean out your bluebird houses by removing old nests and clean out with a weak bleach solution. However, bluebirds (and other birds) will roost in bluebird houses and prefer the nests for keeping warm, so if the temperatures are still very cold wait until it warms up. If you need a bluebird house, the New Hope Audubon Society sells them for only \$15. Please contact me at the email address below if you would like to purchase one. Free delivery!

Feeder Watch continues to report on birds you could be seeing at the bird feeders and/or in your back yard. If you have ideas about what to write, want to report on the birds you are seeing, or have questions about the birds you are seeing, please send me an email at **btdriscoll@bellsouth.net**.

Field Trip Happenings

Well, sad-to-say, we must also bid adieu and give heartfelt thanks to Dianne Byrne who has served as Field Trip chair for over two years. The quality and diversity of trips that she has planned, coordinated and even led has added a new dimension to New Hope Audubon's field trip offerings. She is moving on to shine her light for volunteer activities in literacy. Dianne said she would still see us at membership meetings and on some bird walks, so she won't be leaving us entirely.

Should you have the interest to become the new Field Trip chair, please call Marsha Stephens at 732-4014 for more information on the duties and qualifications for the position.

Jordan Lake Christmas Bird Count

December 31, 2006 – Compiler's Notes

The Jordan Lake (NC) Christmas Bird Count was held on December 31, 2006 – a mild winter day with overcast skies, moderate temperatures, and no precipitation. Our counters identified **91** species, just shy of our average of 92 for the preceding ten years. Our total of **27,240** individual birds was a new high. Though our estimated number of Ring-billed Gulls (5,000) was down a bit from previous years, our record number of American Coots (2,270) took up the slack. We had 58 birders (10-year average: 60) in 26 parties (average: 23) who counted for 149 party-hours (average: 145). That's approximately 183 birds per party-hour, a new high (average: 143).

Unusual species:

- Mark Johns spent a couple of hours in a boat fishing and birding and reported 1 Osprey, 1 Great Black-backed Gull, and 2 Fish Crows. The Osprey was our first Christmas Count record since 1991. Sterling Southern also reported a Fish Crow. Last year was the first time we had this species on the count.
- Betty King, Barbara Roth, Peg Shultz, and Judy Teague found 1 Spotted Sandpiper. We first recorded winter Spotties in 2003.
- Patsy Bailey and Norm Budnitz found a Merlin, just about the last bird they saw as they were heading to the lunch-time countdown.

Notable numbers. We had a remarkable number of record highs this year:

Species	New High	Previous High	Year	Species	New High	Previous High	Year
Canada Goose	420	388	2005	Brown-headed Nuthatch	218	156	2004
Wood Duck	32	30	1995	House Wren	7	4	Several Years
Black Vulture	157	131	1997	Northern Mockingbird	86	83	1995
American Coot	2,270	1,113	2000	Common Yellowthroat	5	4	Several Years
Red-bellied Woodpecker	206	186	2005	Fox Sparrow	59	44	1998
Downy Woodpecker	142	125	1999	Red-winged Blackbird	3,204	1,545	1997
Hairy Woodpecker	30	26	2005	Common Grackle	2,532	1,134	1995
Fish Crow	3	2	2005				

Notable misses: Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Screech-Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Blue-headed Vireo.

The warmth of Harris Lake may be at least one factor in the large number of Coots reported by Angelo Capparella and Will Cook. Tom Krakauer and John Stellwagen observed what they described as "an enormous congregation Nuthatches." They watched a continuous mixed flock of Kinglets, Chickadees, Pine Warblers, and Brown-headed Nuthatches as the birds flew across a road for about 10 minutes. And Jennifer Maher, Robin Moran, and Judy Murray watched a large flock of Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles.

Kudos. Tom Driscoll and Phil Warren copped the honors for total species this year with 59, followed closely by Angelo Capparella and Will Cook with 57.

For the record: We had 58 birders in 26 parties. We put in 149 party hours (110 on foot, 29 by car, 2 by bicycle, 8 by canoe/Kayak/boat), 338 miles (82 on foot, 236 by car, 15 by bicycle, 5 by canoe/kayak/boat), and 3 hours and 12 miles owling. The weather was mild (52?F to 61?F) with winds calm to light and variable. The sky was overcast all day. There was no precipitation and no ice coverage.

Norm Budnitz, compiler

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Still Looking...

for individuals interested in working on Membership and Publicity for the chapter. We've already begun to organize contacts to disseminate our chapter activities and projects. Now we need a few volunteers to make sure we keep it going. If you like working with people and are good at organizing, please call Marsha Stephens at 732-4014.

Join Our Listserv!

New Hope Audubon has a listserv that is available through Yahoo. We will send out notifications and reminders of programs, field trips, festivals, conservation news, counts, etc. If you already have a Yahoo userid and password, you may just sign in and follow the directions in order to join the group. The link is:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/newhopeaudubon/

If you don't have a Yahoo account you need to create a userid and password by following the directions on the screen to make these. You will receive email confirmation of your account and group membership. The suggestion to promote the list in the upcoming newsletter is great. This could really become a useful tool for communicating all field trips, programs, conservation efforts, festivals, counts, etc., including opportunities that arise at short notice.

Web Developments

Patrick Coin resigned his position as our long-time web editor (as he prefers to call it) at the end of last year. Over the many years he has dedicated himself in a myriad of ways to furthering the outreach and education effort for NHAS. My historical memory of all his contributions is not long, but Patrick has been a rock for the chapter- serving on the board in several capacities, being newsletter



editor and web editor, conducting field trips, to name some of his recent activities. Thank you so much, Patrick, from all of us at New Hope Audubon! Happily, Patrick will continue to write his column for the newsletter, "A Triangle Naturalist's Almanac," which is always informative and entertaining. And, I'm sure we'll be able to prevail upon him to share his slides on occasion.

Please join me in welcoming Dave Curtin who has agreed to take on the task of Webmaster. He has been a member for many years, has a solid computer background, and we look forward to his taking us into the future web world. You may have noticed that we're in the process of updating the NHAS site. If you have any suggestions for changes or additions, please let Dave know!

New Hope Audubon Field Trips & Calendar of Activities

Sat., Feb. 24, 8 AM	Bird Walk to Local Hot Spot with Cynthia Fox, owner of Wild Bird Center in Eastgate Shopping Center, Chapel Hill. Meet at the store at 7:55 AM. Carpools leave from the store.				
Thurs., March 1, 7 PM	General Meeting. Speaker: Susan Campbell "Hummingbirds of North Carolina" North Carolina Botanical Gardens				
Sat., March 3, 9 AM	Stream Watch. Trip Leader: John Kent				
Sat., March 10, 8 AM	Cynthia Fox will lead a Bird Walk through Duke Gardens in Durham. Meet at the Gardens parking lot at 7:55 am.				
Sunday, March 18, 1 PM	Tom Driscoll will lead a Bird Walk to a site to be determined, depending on what bird species are being seen at various local birding spots. Meet at the Mardi Gras bowling lanes parking lot (intersection of Hwy. 54 and Farrington Rd., Durham) by 12:55 PM. If interested, please call or e-mail Tom to let him know you will be going.				
Sat., March 24, 8 AM	Cynthia Fox will lead a Bird Walk to a local hot spot. Meet at the Wild Bird Center, Eastgate Shopping Center, at 7:55 AM. Carpools leave from the store.				
Thursday, April 5, 7 PM	General Meeting. Speaker: Norm Budnitz "30 Years of Christmas and Spring Bird Counts at Jordan Lake: What do the data show?" North Carolina Botanical Gardens				
Sat., April 7, 9 AM	Stream Watch. Trip Leader: John Kent				
Sat., April 14, 8 AM	Cynthia Fox will lead a Bird Walk through Duke Gardens in Durham. Meet at the Gardens parking lot at 7:55 A				
Sat., April 28, 8 AM	Cynthia Fox will lead a Bird Walk to a local hot spot. Meet at the Wild Bird Center, Eastgate Shopping Center, at 7:55 AM. Carpools leave from the store.				
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NOTE: Exact field trip locations and dates may change due to weather, recent sightings, or other circumstances. Please contact the field trip chair or trip leader before the trip to confirm times and meeting locations.

If there are no pre-registrants, the field trip may be cancelled.

Chris Canfield - Audubon North Carolina



Please join me in welcoming Angela Mangiameli to the Audubon team. Angela joined Audubon NC in early January 2007. She grew up in Texas where she received her Bachelor of Science in Biology from The University of Texas at Arlington. Her dedication to conservation of wildlife, particularly birds, led her to pursue a Master of Science in Wildlife Management from Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas, where she studied wading bird behavior and habitat use. After graduating in May 2006 she spent her time over the summer as a research technician working with Crested Caracaras in

Florida. Angela is now looking forward to continuing work in the field of bird conservation and management in North Carolina. She will serve as Audubon NC's Conservation Biologist for the IBA and Sanctuary Programs, and will be based in the Wilmington office.

Perhaps the NC Birding Trail will be a point of entry for some new, young birdwatchers and conservationists. Good news is that the coastal section now has printable maps and guides on the web. Use them and tell your friends and relatives! See below for details and a story on the benefits of the coastal trail from the Wilmington paper.

North Carolina Birding Trail

Announcing an important update to the North Carolina Birding Trail website! Site description and group maps for the coastal plain region are now available on our website (**www.ncbirdingtrail.org**). Look under Trails/Coast for links to the coastal region map, group maps (pdf format), and site descriptions (pdf format). Be sure and read the 3-page Introduction for important safety and travel information. And as you plan trips along the NC Birding Trail, use the Travel Resources page to search for county-specific accommodations or other travel information.

Sincerely, The North Carolina Birding Trail c/o North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission 1722 Mail Service Center Raleigh, NC 27699-1722

The Wilmington Star Article Fowl Prowl

State Trail Lures Bird Watchers Out of Their Nests January 11, 2007

More than two dozen sites along the lower Cape Fear coast — from Airlie Gardens to the Zeke's Island Coastal Preserve — have been linked to a state trail aimed at bird-loving tourists.

Audubon North Carolina and five state and federal agencies launched work on the N.C. Birding Trail in 2003. The coastal trail runs from Currituck Sound to the Brunswick County-South Carolina line.

Another trail, running through the state's central Piedmont region is expected to be unveiled later this year, according to Salinda Daley, N.C. Birding Trail coordinator with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. A mountain trail will be added in 2008. State officials hope to issue a guidebook to the N.C. Coastal Birding Trail this summer, Daley said, adding that each of the 102 sites statewide offers "a quality habitat," with birds "beyond what you might see in your own backyard."



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New Hope Audubon Society 2006-2007 Officers

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Important Bird Areas: Jordan Lake Chair			
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