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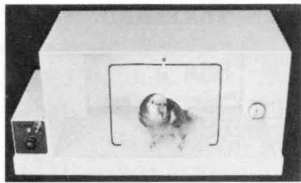


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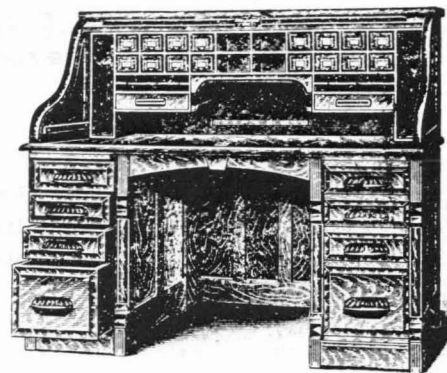
NOTICE

All correspondence intended for the editor of the Watchbird should be mailed directly to his address.

Sheldon Dingle
P.O. Box 340
Norco, CA 91760

From The Editor's Desk

by Sheldon Dingle



Not an official AFA meeting goes by without the question arising, "Does the Watchbird represent the AFA members or does it represent the interests of the minority AFA leadership? Or does it ignore both of these factions and reflect the position of a hermit editor?" These questions are valid and not so easily answered. In searching for answers one must dig into the very nature of an "in-house" publication.

Ideally, the interests of the members and the leaders would be one and the same and would be brought to fruition in the magazine by the editor. A few years ago when all the AFA members and leaders could meet in one room this was certainly the case. During the past decade or so, though, the AFA has grown and now includes thousands of members with widely varying interests. There are folks with one pet bird. There are owners and operators of pet stores and quarantine stations. There are professional curators of birds at large public zoos as well as owners of large and small private breeding facilities. There are conservationists and down-right rapists, indeed, so many viewpoints are now affiliated with the AFA that there is bound to be some conflict and disagreement.

Keep in mind, however, that the Watchbird is owned by you, the AFA member. It has a responsibility to represent every member whether they have one pet canary or a huge farm of breeding birds. If we were a privately owned magazine whose main purpose is making profit the choices would be easy — we'd cater to the segment of the industry that buys advertising. That is a simple business decision that any astute entrepreneur would understand.

But the Watchbird is owned, after all, by you, and we feel that we should represent you in direct proportions to your numbers and interests regardless of the size of your purse. This is where some of the difficulty arises. Without your input it is impossible to know what you want. A very vocal leader could, by honking loud and long, con-

vince us in error that his will is the majority will. A more accurate body of data develops when you all express your opinions on what the Watchbird should be. It has been four years since we took a formal poll and it's past time for another. In the AFA there is virtually no concise communication from the members or leaders to the Watchbird staff. The poll response, on the other hand, has been very good so we'll do it again.

Something to consider, though, something the casual thinker often fails to understand, is that the Watchbird is meant (by AFA mandate) to go to people who are already members of the AFA. It is a club bulletin, if you will, a journal for an exclusive group — members of the organization.

The Watchbird is not designed for public consumption. It is not designed as a subscription magazine to be had by anyone who sends money. It does not come before one joins the AFA. It is one of the benefits one receives after joining. The magazine, of necessity, touches on many items of interest to members of the AFA but of no interest whatever to non-members.

This being the case, it is of the utmost importance that you, as a member, let your interests be known. There is a questionnaire on the yellow insert in this issue. Please fill it out and return it at your earliest convenience. The Watchbird has a good deal of flexibility and can shift this way or that as you indicate. After all, our job here is to give you what you want. To hear is to obey.

This column serves as a forum where many voices are heard. Sometimes it will be a lonely voice crying in the wilderness. Other times it will be a majority opinion expressed by one of our glorious leaders. We do not shy from controversy if the points are pertinent, and we invite your own thoughts on any matter relating to aviculture.

The following letters are some of those crossing my desk recently.



August 13, 1986

Dear Mr. Dingle,

I wish to congratulate the A.F.A. for putting on an excellent convention! Not only was the program informative, but also the location was ideal for the meeting. Where else can one go where during the day he or she is exposed to literally a library of experts in aviculture and through the night sample the charms of an historic city from jambalaya to Bourbon Street? I look forward to seeing what plans A.F.A. has for Seattle!

However, even with such a good foundation, a convention cannot be deemed a success. What really impresses a person attending an A.F.A. meeting is the graciousness and helpfulness shown by the seasoned members to novice bird breeders — without this, the A.F.A. would be just an organization publishing a magazine. When a well-respected aviculturist makes time to share a bird rearing "secret," suggest a new technique in hand-feeding, or encourage someone getting started in bird breeding (or just having a bad breeding season), it makes a long-lasting impression on one lone person. One might ask what good that accomplishes, yet with such a gesture, an old tradition in aviculture is being overturned: our organization is moving from a competitive, business-oriented membership, to an association of well-informed people whose primary concern is the propagation of healthy, beautiful birds in captivity. This is where the future of A.F.A. lies. I wish to thank those people who, through their kindness and generosity, truly made the New Orleans meeting memorable for not only me but also many others. This letter would be totally unnecessary except for the fact that these people give of their knowledge and experience unaware of the importance it holds for others. Congratulations, A.F.A.!

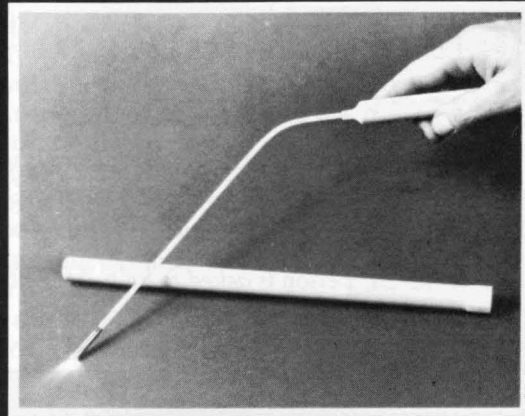
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Ed's Desk continued on next page.

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Mr. Dingle:

I would like to comment on the article "Show Suggestions," by Dana Hermes and Joan C. Davis, that appeared in the Aug/Sept issue of *The AFA Watchbird*. The intention of the authors was to "help ease confusion and streamline these (hookbill) categories." I'm afraid a number of their suggestions would further confuse things and would have the opposite effect of streamlining.

Forshaw tends to group *all* subspecies of parrots under the common name of the nominative species, which is why the triton and Eleonora are listed as greater or Sulphur-crested cockatoos (or plain sulphur-crested). In bird-show practice, the greater sulphur is the *true* greater — *galerita galerita*, the nominative species. Therefore, the Society of Parrot Breeders and Exhibitors has separate classes for greaters, tritons and Eleonoras. Because Leadbeater's cockatoo is so rare, there is no separate class for it, but the rose-breasted cockatoo is no longer so rare as the authors would have us believe, and they do turn up at shows with some frequency, So SPBE does include a separate class for them. If it happens that there are no birds entered in any class, we simply skip it and award no prizes for it.

It is true that there is no such thing as a "medium sulphur," but I was in the pet trade for 20 years before I ever heard of it. It was described to me — by a well-known aviculturist(!) — as a hybrid between the greater and the lesser. Most so-called "mediums" are actually either Eleonoras or one of the larger subspecies of lesser. The citron is indeed a subspecies of lesser, but it turns up at shows often enough — and its appearance is distinctive enough — to merit its own class.

The authors suggest dividing up the hookbills between small and large ones, claiming that to compare a ring-neck and a macaw is like judging apples and oranges. In fact, the size delineation is deceptive. There are conures larger than some macaws, and there are Amazons that are easily as small as most pionus, just as there are other Amazons that are humongous. Still, the spectacled or white-fronted Amazon has more in common with a yellow-nape than it does with a canary-wing parakeet or even with a pionus. And a Noble's macaw is closer to a hyacinth than it is to a nanday. My point is that to differentiate by size doesn't make the judge's task necessarily any easier, and I'd rather see the birds grouped by their taxonomic designations, or geographical

distributions. Dividing into two groups instead of one also seems unfair to exhibitors of non-hookbills, particularly if the hookbill entry is small; it means you have the best chance of winning if you enter parrots as opposed to finches or canaries or whatever.

I am in strong disagreement with the authors' suggestion that clipped wings be acceptable on the show bench (the one exception is in shows that have pet bird classes). The major purpose of a bird show is to screen for future breeding stock by singling out those characteristics that ought to be maintained in a species through captive breeding. It is more difficult to judge conformation and condition if a bird has been clipped. Many birds hold their wings differently when clipped, and often body feathers will poke out through the gaps left by the missing feathers of the wings. I'm also not sure why the authors would allow large birds to be shown if they are clipped, but would not extend the same exception to small birds, which are clipped for the same reasons. Moreover, clipping a bird's wings might be used to disguise the fact that the feathers were in poor condition. Unscrupulous exhibitors already sometimes trim feather edges (which is grounds for disqualification in my book); to allow clipped wings on the show bench would make cheating easier.

I am in complete agreement with the authors about warning people not to touch the show cages or get too close to the birds. Not only do such people risk personal injury, but it can stress the birds and spread disease. There is always a minimal risk of illness at shows, but why increase the risks? I would like to add a suggestion for judges, which I have tried myself with some success. Pick up from the veterinarian or a medical supply house one of those glass or plastic bottles used to soak cotton swabs with alcohol. These alcohol containers are designed so that you press the swab down on top of the bottle and the liquid is dispensed to the pad. I fill this bottle with a solution of 1 part chlorine bleach to 30 parts water; it is a very good disinfectant, and it's real cheap. Judges who are accustomed to using a stick or pointer can make sure they have a non-porous one (they are available at most stationery stores). Any time you find your pointer has touched a bird or a cage, you can give the pointer a swipe with disinfectant before moving on to the next entry. This takes next to no time at all, and exhibitors are very pleased to see that you take the trouble to give a little added protection against

the spread of disease. Ordinary cotton swabs, pads or even plain tissues can be used to apply the bleach-water. Use a new swab each time you wipe the pointer.

When I was a show manager, by the way, I found security was next to impossible at the end of a show because the exhibitors were always in such a hurry to leave early. Sometimes they would actually sneak out or strongarm their way past show committee members who were trying to check out the birds. Some practical suggestions as to how security could be beefed up would be welcome. I tried getting exhibitors to sign statements to the effect that birds would be left in the show hall until released by the show committee, but it didn't really improve matters — just gave the show committee headaches when hundreds of "special cases" just happened to arise at the end of the show. It is usually the birds' owners who are at fault for this lack of security, and I don't know of any answers to it in most show situations, since armed guards and attack dogs are too expensive for most clubs.

Sincerely,
Jon Hoffman
Bloomington, Indiana



Jerry Jennings, President AFA

Dear Mr. Jennings

I read your reply to Mr. Gabel in the last *Watchbird* and somehow I expected that the president of AFA would have a less biased outlook toward hybrids which are a part of aviculture the same as mutations. Perhaps as the copy of my letter to Mr. Gabel suggests AFA has reached its peak, much as the NRA and other fringe groups have done in recent years. Perhaps the idea that to encourage, support, endorse or have a policy of the organization that is perceived to have some influence is valid. However I support the war against smuggling but am on the opposite side when it comes to mutations, linebreeding or hybridization. Having a scientific background I see some of the ideas expressed as policies being somewhat naive and made by some who do not understand the full implications of the subject about which they speak. I see no reason why species and hybrids should not compete for favor in the one place where it

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IFCB Symposium information and registration appears on page 39 in this issue of *Watchbird*.

means something; in the marketplace. To bail against the tide is the utmost in folly. If people want to buy hybrids then nothing AFA does is going to make one bit of difference; if the demand is there the marketplace will supply the demand, however the marketplace should be the determiner not the president of AFA.

The utter simplicity of the idea that we should breed only "the species" has little to support it in real life. Look to dogs and cats for the variety the marketplace will support. How many wild dogs from which our new species *Canis familiaris* was derived are supported by the marketplace? I don't say that in birds the same will hold true but I will say that the demand for hybrids will be met. Actually the idea of self-sustaining populations of species in captivity cannot be done by the very definition of aviculture. By not allowing natural selection we are muleing the species to our own choice of environment. There is no validity to the idea when the real species is examined in the natural environment. There, selection is for the best suited for the local environment. For some species such as macaws which have a limited range it is the local environment; for others such as the ducks the environment is sometimes a vast area. In other species such as the ocean birds the environment is large but relatively unchanging and the better fit is to meeting the challenges of such an environment. Until and unless AFA supports some form of selection (i.e. removal by death, usually thought of as predation) other than the norm in captive breeding then calling AFA a defender of species by captive breeding is ludicrous. By the very definition of a wild population of a given species we are not breeding the species in captivity. In a purely scientific debate using the accepted definitions of the words the entire idea falls apart. I understand you are a lawyer, to a lawyer words have meanings and that meaning is closely circumscribed. STOP on a stop sign means just that, not a rolling stop, not hitting the brakes and slowing somewhat but a complete cessation of movement for some time period that is detectable. A species is a constantly evolving entity (a population) which exists in time and space and is constantly being modified by replacement of the failures by better adapted replacements. The failures are those individuals in the population that die for whatever reason. Some of the failures may have produced offspring which remain in the population for some time period. They

thus leave behind genes in the population gene pool. We can then rate failures as those who never hatch, those who don't survive to fledge, those that don't survive to sexual maturity, those that fail to produce progeny and those that die of old age or other cause after having produced progeny. As you can see only one class leaves behind a contribution to the species gene pool. It is this selection that fine tunes a species (the entire population including the genes from previous generations) to the environment. Show me some sort of selection that is practiced in aviculture. In looking over the ads you have run selling birds I detect not one word about this. Does this mean you only sold the best of the litter and destroyed the remainder? Perhaps you sold the misfits, those that for some reason or another you didn't want to keep but wanted to pass on to someone else. Did they kill mates, destroy eggs, pick feathers, act retarded, or maybe produce defective young? I know part of the answer already, what answer will you give?

The mutations fall into the same class as hybrids, they are produced for the enjoyment of the viewer, not for the ability to survive in the wild. Chickens are bred and hybridized for various reasons. I was looking at a 1908 Sears catalog the other day. They thought a chicken that layed 200 eggs a year was outstanding. Less than 325 eggs today and out comes the axe. Where is the wild chicken today? If you raised them could you sell any? The canaries look like nothing ever seen in the wild and there are probably no birds known as canaries that are not hybrids to some degree. Even in the macaws there are natural hybrids and these have been bred back into the species. What would AFA do if I had been breeding these macaws based on what they most resembled originally and linebred toward what we know today as hybrids? If I took some of the scarlets from South America that show faint traces of having been influenced by blue and golds somewhere back when and bred what appeared to be identical to Catalinas but called them scarlets what would the policy be? What is the policy toward the Department of the Interior and the dusky seaside sparrow? There were, I believe, six males which were bred to another species or subspecies. The offspring were bred back to the original males from what I have heard at least once and possibly more times. Will AFA consider these hybrids? Will they ever become the species again? Whatever

your answer, consider the implications of lack of selection for the environment in each succeeding generation. The definition of species incorporates the ideas of selection toward a given fine tuning to the environment faced by the species. At what point will the "self-sustaining captive population" fail to meet this test? As an example take the Pere David deer that are known to have become extinct in the wild some time ago. The surviving specimens were captive raised for years in a small park. The deer of today are known to differ from the original species but not by how much. Would AFA consider this a species? It is a non-species by definition; it doesn't exist in the wild. For that matter now that there are no wild California condors does that species exist anymore? By definition it doesn't. Now put your lawyer's arguments to work and define a captive population that equates to the wild population. Can it resume the species concept if and when it can be reestablished in the wild? Once natural selection no longer applies the arguments can be made forever. Remember once a species is gone (i.e. extinct) another heaven and earth must pass for it to be duplicated.

I agree with your proposal that AFA disclaim any item published as not being policy; however it will be necessary to disclaim all materials submitted and published not just those that have something about hybrids, mutations or linebreeding. As I have had the law explained to me in Washington by a friend who is involved in this area with the justice department if AFA adopts a policy that is not actually part of its reason for being it crosses a thin line from non-profit group to something akin to a PAC which lobbies for something for a political purpose. If AFA does cross this line I would feel it necessary to challenge the policy and status of the group. Actually it appears to me the line has been crossed from your answer and the past presidents' remarks. My suggestion is to back off, represent each part of aviculture fairly, don't take positions that do not represent the feelings of each member. I think you are on firm ground about the violations of the law position because of the law breaking aspects, but AFA represents aviculture and not just breeders of pure species.

I think you made a muddy answer to the prior censorship issue. It is a first amendment issue pure and simple. All your verbiage about not knowing in advance leaves me cold, if you knew in advance would you then attempt to

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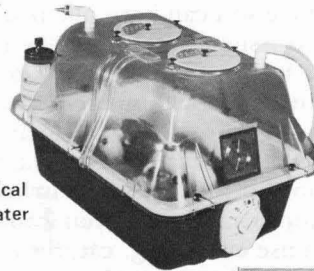
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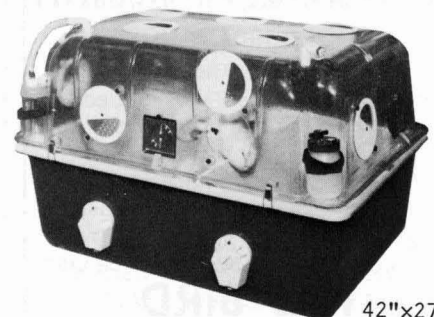


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ensor? The prosecutor I talked to said your answer left him feeling that if you knew what a speaker was going to say you might turn him off, literally or by withdrawing or not issuing the invitation. He asked me to get him a copy of the current and original charter for the group so he could see exactly what the organization was supposed to do. If the word education appears, then any form of restraint, even the disclaimer on such articles, would be suspect. For a lawyer I suspect your brief, if based on that rational, would fail when applied to the law.

Actually I think the *Watchbird* is worth the bias that I see toward what is an important part of aviculture. The magazine is well done. I belong to a number of similar type organizations each of which has a publication and other than ads in the front section I rate the *Watchbird* as very high if not the best of the group. I felt that Lee Phillips' comments were inappropriate about the waste of species when making hybrids and I think your answer was unsuitable for a national organization. If the AFA has a closed position such as the NRA about gun control then it will restrict itself to that audience alone. That is unfortunate when it could represent the entire range of views in areas where there is a consensus.

I should very much like to see Mr. Gabel write an article why people should not breed for mutations and set up parents for hybrids. From his style of writing I feel I could answer his statements with logic and truth and refute whatever he had to say. I assume that you would also appreciate an answer from the other side as much as you would appreciate one from him. I would like an advance copy of his article so I can have one ready for the next issue. Hopefully he would again use his proposed censorship of educational materials and I could get one of the legal beagles in DC to answer that part of it. Maybe he even wants to burn books if they mention hybrids. Such people have even been known to say license every dog, cat, bird, gun, car, bike, roller skate, thought, view and maybe breath if you disagree. Perhaps you might want to reconsider the disclaimer unless each and every item published is disclaimed. The way you seem to have proposed it would effectively inhibit this part of the education policy. By the way, do you alone have that kind of authority? If so, then the status of the organization is in serious danger. For someone who has been through the rigors of law school and should have

their thought process worked out you sound like a politician running for office who will say whatever it takes to get elected or reelected.

Richard Vagner
Sykesville, MD 21784



Dear Mr. Vagner:

Thank you for your undated letter and your critique of my reply to Mr. Gabel in the *Watchbird*.

Once again, I will reaffirm the AFA policy regarding hybrids. That policy is to discourage the hybridizing of species. This policy is not my personal policy, as you suggested, but a policy adopted by the Board of Directors some years ago. Since that time, we have grown considerably, and are still growing, so I assume the policy has not been detrimental and, therefore, also assume we are a long way from our "peak" contrary to your belief.

As the president of AFA it is not only within my "authority," but my responsibility to execute and promulgate board policy. I might add that we also do not encourage deliberate cultivation of mutations, though we recognize and support that concept in *domesticated* species such as canaries, budgies, etc.

Your arguments supporting hybridizing are indicative of a lack of concern for the status of species in the wild. As an aviculturist, I see the responsibility of aviculture to try to give back to nature a little of what we have taken from it. Although the raising of pet birds is a worthy endeavor, we must recognize that captive propagation does offer a conservation tool for the preservation of wild species. It is necessary, in light of that ethic, that we try to maintain a gene pool as nearly like the wild population as possible. You are right that natural selection does not play much of a role in captivity. But that does not mean we should therefore abandon any and all efforts to maintain genetic purity. When the opportunity arises for the release of captive reared individuals back into the wild, in situations where the species has become endangered, we must have specimens as near to the wild form as possible. To suggest that a Catalina macaw is an appropriate subject of a release is ludicrous. Further, to suggest they occur in the wild is totally unsubstantiated by any literature on the matter.

Your suggestion that it may be necessary to disclaim all published materials in light of our policy on hybrids is without merit. The *Watchbird* tries to include articles on all facets of aviculture, including those relying heavily on hybrids, such as the canary fancy. As you noted, canaries do not occur in the wild in any form remotely similar to the domestic form. However, that cannot be said about the macaws. Our ability to publish articles is not dependent on the view of the author with regard to hybrids, but on the submission of quality material suitable for publication.

Your suggestion that AFA may have crossed the line from non-profit to PAC is, once again, without merit. AFA's reason for being is manifold: education, conservation, and scientific research. In the arena of education we publish a magazine packed with informative articles, hold conferences twice a year where numerous lectures and seminars are offered, and sponsor annually a veterinary seminar to educate upcoming avian practitioners. In the arena of scientific research we fund a number of research projects at the university level on a variety of subjects pertinent to aviculture, i.e. nutrition, behavior, etc. In the field of conservation we support a number of projects to conserve and preserve species both in the wild and in captivity. In the name of conservation, our board of directors has deemed it appropriate to discourage hybridization of non-domestic species. We are, therefore, not acting beyond the scope of our charter, or the requirements for maintaining non-profit status.

As to your suggestion that we would censor material, one only has to read the *Watchbird* a few times to recognize we publish without regard to the author's political viewpoint, whether that view is controversial or not. I would suggest you acquire some back issues to refresh your memory as to the nature of the controversies we have aired in the "Letters to the Editor" column.

Again, let me reiterate, we oppose hybridization of species normally found in the wild, and are not opposed to that activity in domesticated species. I should add, however, that people should not be out there trying to create mutations and hybrids of non-domesticated species, especially endangered species. If it were possible to have one set of birds with pure genetic background and one set with the hybridized genes and the two populations could be kept separate, there would be room for discussion. However,

that is not possible given the concern and ability of many for record keeping.

Sincerely yours,
Jerry Jennings, president

Unbeknownst to Jerry Jennings I am holding a very interesting article on hybridization written by Mr. Vagner. As soon as I can get a credible author to write an article expressing an alternate opinion I'll run the two pieces side by side and you, gentle reader, can make up your own mind on the matter. Ed.



Dear Sheldon:

I would like to commend you, Nancy Winters, and the many other men and women who have invested much more than simple time in the preservation of the American Federation of Aviculture. So many times there are good-intentioned joiners who forget it takes more than intentions to make an organization strong. Thank you for reminding us.

Spreading the news is each of our responsibilities. And, it doesn't require that we be streetside evangelists. What's an easy way to tell literally hundreds of people about the AFA? Well, you can start by purchasing a membership for the local city library. The *Watchbird* is a beautiful magazine with a variety of subjects in each edition. Surely it deserves more readers than a single family or club can provide. It's our job to see that the goals and purpose of the AFA are disseminated, not locked away in a vinyl periodical binder and forgotten.

I've just given my library a gift membership to the organization. I hope others will follow suit. It's a small gesture, but one that might make a difference.

Best wishes,
Jan Parrott-Holden
Vancouver, Washington



Dear *Watchbird*,

Wow! What a delight to receive the June-July 86 issue.

I was very pleased to see two articles on waterfowl, the tule goose and the pied-bill grebe.

Please don't forget us waterfowlers out there. We patiently wait through many issues of "parrots" and are really reinforced when we see our favorites, the waterfowl.

Keep up the good work with the best aviculture magazine in the world.

Gerald Rebar, Sr.
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