

Promoting Native Plants for Natural Landscapes.

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All articles for the April 2018 newsletter, must be submitted to:
Constance@wildonesrrvc.org
by March 23, 2018.

Dragons Rule!
Thursday, March 15, 2018

Location: Rock Valley College
Student Center Atrium
(adjacent to the PE Center; same parking lot)
3301 North Mulford Road, Rockford, 61114

Time: 7:00 p.m.



Over 300 million years ago, dragonflies with 2-1/2-foot wingspans ruled the air. Today, there are more than 100 species in Illinois. Dragonflies provide a visual feast for nature lovers from May to October. They are superb aerialists that are marvelous to watch. These insects are beautiful, fierce, and lively. Some are easy to find, photograph, and identify, while others are very challenging.

We search for them and monitor their presence and populations because they are excellent indicators of water quality. Some species are very particular about the cleanliness, alkalinity, temperature, and oxygen content of the water that they inhabit. Other species can thrive almost

anywhere. High quality habitat will generally support the greatest diversity of dragonflies.

This program will help you get started in studying dragonflies, with information about anatomy, life cycle, identification, helpful resources, and tips on catching and photographing dragonflies.

Barbara Williams is a life-long student of natural history with many years of experience as a birder, photographer, and traveler. She worked at Burpee Museum's biology department for around 10 years, tending and cataloguing the collections, creating exhibits, and preparing specimens of plants, insects, birds, and mammals. She monitors bumble bees and other pollinators, as well as bats and dragonflies with the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County citizen science program.

Barbara grew up on the east coast and has lived in Rockford for 30 years with her husband, Dan. They are active in land conservation and restoration, as well as environmental education in northern Illinois

This program is free and open to the public.
For more information, call (779) 537-8939

Message from the President Constance McCarthy



Constance McCarthy
photo by Tim Lewis

I have been asked to give a presentation this month at Womanspace in Rockford. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to tell folks about our chapter, our native plant sales, and ways to get involved in our many activities. And I'm already enjoying mulling over the specifics of this presentation, which I've decided to title "Everything Is Connected: Why Gardening with Native Plants Matters."

People who are interested in birds soon realize that they need native plants to provide food and cover for the birds. And birds need insects to eat and feed their young. A great way to attract more insects? Plant natives.

People who are interested in pollinators also soon realize that they need native plants to attract and support pollinators in their home landscape. Indeed, there can be no protecting and attracting pollinators without native plants.

The more one learns about nature and our ecosystem, the less possible it becomes to stay in a single silo of interest. I can't imagine meeting a bird or pollinator enthusiast who was adamant that they had no need for native plants.

Small discoveries open our eyes to more and more connections between various things in nature. I suspect that I wasn't the only one who thoroughly enjoyed last month's speaker, Matt Candeias. The story of his journey through academia was inspiring, especially the recurring epiphanies and joyous amazement at how one thing in nature can support many other things.

I have also been pondering his mention that we tend to value plants based only on what they can do for us as humans, mainly if they can be grown as a crop or have some medicinal use. This utilitarian approach seems rife with potential pitfalls. One thing I learned from the late Keith Blackmore was to always bear in mind what you *don't* know. It is so easy for us to think that we have all the answers and have figured out how everything works, and what we need and don't need. What of the plant that, today, seems to be serving no purpose? Some might think, who cares, let's focus on plants that we can use now. Yet, perhaps one such plant holds the cure for cancer or some other devastating disease - but this remains to be discovered by a future generation.

Everything is connected today. But also far into the future, in ways that our human minds can't begin to grasp. Protecting and promoting natives isn't just for the here and now, but for our children and their children, and on and on.



Prairie & Wetland Plant Sale Corner Cynthia Chmell, sale co-coordinator

As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter, we are very excited about changes coming to this year's plant sales. First, the two plant sales are being combined into one single sale. Second, with the addition of wetland plants this year, this major event will be a woodland/prairie/wetland plant sale. To fire up interest in the sale, we will be highlighting a few plants each month, including:

Wild hyacinth (*Camassia scilloides*). Growing in full sun to light shade in moist, rich soils. Associated with shooting star, rattlesnake master, and prairie dropseed in prairies, and trout lily, wild geranium, May apple, Solomon's seal, Jacob's ladder, and trillium in woodland borders. Blue flowers bloom May-June on 1-2' stems.

Sweet Indian plantain (*Hasteola suaveolens*).

Pollen and nectar source for a wide variety of bees and butterflies. Grows in light shade to full sun in wet to moist conditions. Associated with New England aster, mountain mint and spotted Joe Pye weed. This showy plant has fragrant, white blooms from June-September, lasting 2-3 weeks on 3-7' tall stems.

Goat's rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*). Host plant for skippers, and pollen and nectar source for a wide variety of bees. Yellow and pink pea flower blooms June-July on 1-2' tall silvery-silky foliage. Full to part-sun. Requires sandy mesic to dry soils.

Woodland Plant Sale Corner

Planting season is right around the corner and we are so excited to be bringing you a combined woodland/prairie/wetland sale this year! Many woodland plant species will be offered, including:

Shooting star (*Dodecatheon meadia*) Perfect for a deciduous woodland, this plant does its short period of growing before the leaves come out on the trees. It likes a high quality habitat with lots of organic matter and does best when

Jane Evans, woodland plant sale coordinator not smothered by taller plants around it. Queen bumblebees “buzz” pollinate this plant, and other bees collect pollen also.

Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*) is 3-8 inches tall and likes a high quality area with moist/slightly dry soil in dappled to moderate shade. The pollen is used by bees, and the red berries are eaten by game birds and small mammals.

Board of Directors in Action

Cathy Johnson, Secretary

Highlights of activities of the Wild Ones Rock River Valley chapter board of directors, as discussed at the February 8, 2018 meeting, include the following.

- Plans are underway for the first combined woodland, prairie, and wetland plant sale, now being called, the native plant sale.
- All board and coordinator positions have been filled, and a robust annual retreat was well attended in January.
- The chapter’s website has been experiencing technical difficulties recently. Investigations are underway for repairs and improved maintenance, and it’s hoped that the website will be up and running reliably again soon.

Events of Interest

In the spirit of cooperation and mutual support, we like to share details of upcoming events that may be of interest to chapter members. All are free unless noted otherwise.

Mar. 10 Interpretive Hikes. Hosted by Boone County Conservation District. Start at 10:00 a.m. and 1 p.m. at Piscasaw Fen Conservation Area, 8605 Norris Lane, Capron, Illinois. There is a lot of ground to cover, so the hike has been broken into two parts. Attend either or both, as you like. Site contains one of the richest assemblages of native plants known to occur in all of northern Illinois: more than 108 plant species, all packed into a wet area known as a fen. RSVP to (815) 547.5711 or contact Dan Kane at dkane@bccdil.org for more info.

Mar. 13 Natural Land Institute 60th Anniversary Celebration Dinner. At Giovanni’s Restaurant at 5:30 p.m. The keynote speaker will be Alan Branhagen. Tickets are \$45 for NLI members, \$60 for non-members (which includes a 1-year introductory membership). Phone (815) 964.6666 or online at www.naturalland.org.

Mar. 22 Sinnissippi Audubon Society, annual dinner at Burpee Museum of Natural History, 6:30

p.m. Keynote speaker, from the Field Museum, on the recovery of peregrine falcons in Illinois. For more information, phone (815) 543.3658 or email sinnissippiaudubon@gmail.com.

Mar. 25 Wild Up Your Backyard: How to Transform Your Yard into a Wildlife Oasis. Nature at the Confluence campus, South Beloit, 2:00 p.m. A presentation by our chapter’s own Mary Anne Mathwich. Information will also be provided on how to certify your yard as a “Wildlife Habitat” Or “Monarch Waystation.”

Mar. 25 Prescribed burn training. Organized by the Natural Land Institute, held at Nygren Wetland Preserve, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Costs is \$60 and includes a 155-page burn manual. To register, phone (815) 964.6666.

Mar. 28 Take a Closer Look: A Visual Exploration of the Prairies. Presentation at Severson Dells at 7 p.m. Take a virtual walk with Joyce and John Mori, exploring through photography the hidden and often-missed beauty of our local prairies. The program is intended to be of interest to those who are new to prairies, as well as to seasoned naturalists.

February Meeting Recap Ed Cope

photo by Sallie Krebs

Changing the Conversation About Plants



Matt Candeias is a self-described “plant nerd.” Though plant nerds may be a niche group, Matt has found a broad audience through the medium of the Internet. Operating a blog, a podcast, and a YouTube channel – all entitled “In Defense of Plants” – he is

on a mission to help people see plants in a different light. While often overlooked, plants are vibrant, dynamic organisms that deserve a space in the conservation spotlight.

Matt first fell in love with plants while working at a quarry in western New York. He was tasked with helping this quarry bolster its population of wild lupine in support of the endangered Karner blue butterfly (the sole larval food source of the Karner blue is wild lupine). Prior to this restoration effort, Matt had held little interest in plants; however, he began to see that these lupine were not the mundane, static organisms they appeared to be. For starters, they were very difficult to establish. The young sprout required the shelter of a “nurse plant” for shade and water retention – a remarkable relationship that had not been apparent to Matt before. Additionally, there was a vast web of insects that relied upon the plants. While the Karner blue caterpillars grazed upon the leaves, they were tended by ants which lapped up the sweet liquid they excreted. The ants, in turn, defended the caterpillars from predators looking for an easy snack. This fascinating cog in the machinery of an ecosystem was entirely dependent upon the continued existence of the lupine. With a new awareness of the importance of native plants, Matt began to pursue a career in plant conservation – and, importantly, began advocating for that cause.

As he began to pursue a Master’s degree, it became clear that plants perform the wonderful role of opening up resources that other organisms can’t access. Their bodies are built out of gas, minerals, and solar energy – building materials that other living organisms can only take advantage of by

consuming them. Despite this crucial role in every ecosystem on the planet, their protection and rehabilitation is often overlooked in favor of more charismatic animals like pandas. This results in an odd situation where we spend tremendous effort to breed rare animals, yet do not have sufficient habitat in which to reintroduce them. The only real chance a plant has is if it has some obvious use to human society, such as medicinal properties or value as a crop. Consider, for example ginseng and goldenseal. Both of these plants have become quite rare throughout North America, and yet a quick Google search reveals not a single entry on their conservation; rather, they all relate to their purported medicinal value. What’s worse is that over-collection of wild populations has been the single greatest contributing factor in their decline. Our incredibly narrow view of plants is pushing 1 in 5 of them to the brink of extinction.

And this is where In Defense of Plants excels – synthesizing information and telling stories that help fight “plant blindness.” By translating hard science into an interesting and accessible narrative, Matt is able to foster acceptance of – and even affection toward – species that would otherwise be dismissed as boring. Here are a few examples.

Babiana ringens (rat’s tail) produces a very odd stem that juts straight upward above the flower, bearing much resemblance to the tail of a rat. This stem, though, is not what it seems. It’s actually a highly modified, sterile flower! Why would the plant produce such an unusual structure? Apparently, the nectar and pollen of the true flower are quite difficult to reach. And so, the plant has engineered this infertile stalk to serve as a perch for its preferred pollinator, the malachite sunbird. This system ensures that the sunbird has exclusive access to the nectar reward, thereby deterring other nectar robbers who would not also serve as pollinators.

There are many iridescent plants – *Begonia*, *Selaginella*, *Bulbophyllum*, to name a few – that have captivated scientists and growers for centuries. But how does this unique property actually work? As it turns out, these plants are all shade lovers. When you live in the dark forest understory, every stray beam of light is precious. You really need to maximize how much energy you can extract from each photon. For these species, that means stacking your grana (photosynthetic structures within the chloroplast) in such a way that they function like a dense crystal. When a photon enters this space, it is physically slowed down! This allows the photon to spend just a little extra time in the leaf and impart a

February Meeting Recap (cont'd)

little extra energy. A side effect of all this is a release of blue light that we find enchanting.

Illinois prairies, more so than most biomes, suffers from a lack of imagination and appreciation. But there are many plants with fascinating lives to be discovered! *Anemone patens* (pasqueflower) is one of the earliest spring bloomers. It has a couple of remarkable adaptations to help it cope with potentially chilling weather, though. First, its photosynthetic machinery is designed to operate most efficiently at low temperatures. Second, the flowers exhibit a property called heliotropism; that is to say they orient themselves toward the sun. The plant accomplishes this by having cells on the shaded side of the stalk divide faster than those on the unshaded side. This helps to warm the flower up and thereby attract more pollinators.

Symplocarpus foetidus (skunk cabbage) also does its growing when things are cold. The odd inflorescence can begin to develop as early as February, often when there is still snow on the ground. To break through that layer of snow, the flowers actually produce their own heat through a complex metabolic process. When the snow is deep, the melt pattern forms a sort of chimney that helps focus the pungent odor that the flowers produce, attracting pollinators from far and wide. When pollinators find the flowers, they tend to stick around and transfer a lot of pollen. This is because even on a frigid day, the temperature within each flower can reach 59-95°F! The plants also have unique contractile roots. Every time the ground dries out, the roots contract and suck the plant deeper into the mud. This results in a very deeply rooted plant that is excellent at holding soil in place. In places where they grow densely, they might serve as “ecosystem engineers,” much the same way as we think about beavers.

Grasses, which make up a huge proportion of biomass on the prairie, have developed a cunning defense against herbivory. Many species produce phytoliths, small crystals of silica that are nearly indestructible. You can think of these phytoliths as glass armor. Sometimes they're simply impregnated in the leaf tissue, wearing down the teeth of mammals or damaging the gut track of insects. Other times they are arranged in precise patterns along the edges of the leaf. This is why we know *Leersia oryzoides* as “rice cut grass” and *Spartina pectinata* as “ripgut.”

Pedicularis canadensis (wood betony) is a hemiparasitic generalist, leaching nutrients from the roots of more dominant, aggressive plants. As with

any successful parasite, they don't actually kill the host, but they do take a toll on their growth and reproduction. As a result, the surrounding vegetation is not as thick, leaving room for less aggressive species to grow. Amazingly, this helps increase the biodiversity of the prairie by preventing any one species from gaining too competitive an edge. All too often we think of parasites as evil organisms that wreak havoc on the ecosystem, but – as the betony proves – there is much more to them than meets the eye.

Cakile edentula (sea rocket) grows on beaches along Lake Michigan. It has the incredible ability to recognize its own close relatives. From an evolutionary standpoint, this makes sense: if your aim is to spread your genes, you never want to compete with your offspring. Apparently, when this plant is growing near a related individual, its roots grow straight down to leave some room for its kin. If it grows near a stranger, however, the roots spread out and fight for space. Nobody knows exactly how this occurs, but the signal is probably chemical.

Thismia americana was discovered in 1912 in Chicago. It is a very small parasite of fungi, and lives most of its life underground. The only time it is visible above ground is when it flowers, producing a tiny orange flower less than a centimeter tall. Remarkably, it has no other close relatives on this continent, or even this hemisphere. You would have to travel to Tasmania to find another species of *Thismia*. Unfortunately, we did not have time to study how this little plant came to be. It was last seen alive in 1916, and then vanished without a trace.

Lastly, Matt told us about *Iliamna remota* (Kankakee mallow). This is a uniquely Illinoisan species, endemic to Langham Island on the Kankakee River. Growing in only one spot, there has been fear that it would go the way of *Thismia americana*. It has, in fact, disappeared several times, usually as a result of invasive brush taking over the island. However, dedicated volunteers have rallied to the cause and are working to keep the population alive. After clearing the brush, they that found several individuals had sprouted. The population is now on an upward trend again as more brush is cleared.

The future of so many plant species is wholly dependent upon enthusiastic people. Whether you volunteer, or donate, or educate (or all three!), you can be a powerful advocate for these incredible organisms.



The Illinois Big Tree Register, Part 2

Policy regarding fused-stem, multi-stem and anomalous form trees

All current and future editions of the Illinois Big Tree Register (IBTR) will recognize only single, independent stem champion trees. This policy was enacted to eliminate the undeniable circumference advantage that most multi-stem, fused-stem, and anomalous form trees have over single stem, single pith trees with respect to the IBTR nomination process. Please contact the IBTR coordinator if you are unsure about the eligibility of your nomination.

Circumference measurements

Circumference is measured on the largest independent stem, approximately 4.5 feet above ground level. Unfortunately, for measuring purposes, not all trees have a single, straight, branch-free main stem. Therefore, in order to properly measure tree circumference, it must be determined whether the tree (i) has a single stem that can be measured at exactly 4.5 feet above ground level, (ii) has a single stem with a growth, defect, or branch directly at 4.5 feet, or (iii) falls under the category of a fused-stem, multistem, or anomalous form tree. Circumference measurements are to be submitted in inches.

Circumference: Fused-stem trees

A fused-stem, or fused-trunk trees result from the union of two or more separate stems, with a shared, multipith root mass, joined together near or along the base of the tree. A seam indicating the union is always present. Such trees are eligible for the IBTR, but circumference measurements must be taken well above the intimate union where the tree has fused. In other words, the nominator must independently measure the larger of the two stems above the zone of fusion, at least 4.5 feet above ground level.

Circumference: Multi-stem or multi-trunk trees

These result when two or more distinctly separate stems originate below or near 4.5 feet above ground level, resulting in multiple stump piths. When this occurs (quite frequently), only the largest independent stem must be selected and measured for the IBTR nomination process. Such trees are indeed eligible for the IBTR, but only the largest independent stem is to be measured and recorded, and the measurement must be at least 4.5 feet above ground level.

Circumference: Anomalous form trees

These are trees with atypical form that are often referred to as squatty, low-branching, or low-forking trees. They often do not have a single, straight, vertical stem; rather, they have low-branching, forked stems, often the result of

separate stems that have grown into a massive cluster near the base of the tree. Such trees are *not* eligible for the IBTR because of their unfair circumference advantage vis-à-vis single-stem nominations.

Tree height

Total tree height is the measurement of the vertical distance between the base of a tree and its topmost branch. Frequently, the topmost branch will not be directly over the base of the tree. To improve the accuracy of your measurements, take several height measurements and average the results. Useful tools for measuring tree height include a telescoping height pole, a clinometer, and a laser rangefinder. Of all the required big tree measurements, this is the one that is most often miscalculated and overestimated.

Average crown spread

This is determined by measuring the widest extent, or horizontal distance, of the tree's crown and averaging it with a similar crown spread measurement taken at a right angle to the widest crown spread measurement. Useful tools for measuring crown spread include a 150-foot fiberglass tape and wire flags.

GPS coordinates

Detailed location information by way of GPS coordinates or latitude and longitude is now required for every big tree nomination. GPS coordinates must be submitted in decimal degree format, and the GPS coordinates reported on the nomination form must pinpoint the exact location of your big tree nomination. Handheld GPS units, most smartphones, and GoogleEarth are the three most common means of finding and reporting latitude and longitude.

High-resolution digital photographs

High-resolution, greater than 1.0 megabytes, digital photographs (jpg files) must accompany all big tree nominations, submitted via email. These photos serve three purposes: (i) species identification, (ii) form and eligibility, and (iii) aesthetic beauty and bragging rights. These photos are invaluable and save volunteers a lot of time verifying big tree nominations. The photos must be sufficient in clarity and scope to positively identify big tree nominations to the species level, and must include: main stem of tree from two different angles; bark of the tree; twig with live terminal buds and axillary buds; leaves (entire leaf, not just leaflets); fruit (e.g., nut, samara, drupe, pome), if available; and flowers (if necessary to distinguish species). For expert advice on how to take and submit digital photos for big tree

The Illinois Big Tree Register, Part 2 (cont'd)

nominations, visit Vanderbilt University's Bioimages website (specifically, Proposed Photographic Standards: Woody Angiosperms).

Tree identification

Proper identification of champion and co-champion trees is paramount to promoting and operating a high-caliber big tree program. Therefore, positive ID is required for all nominations. Local U of IL Extension offices, arboreta, botanical gardens, IDNR offices, and

forest preserve districts are among great resources for assistance with tree identification.

This article reprinted (with permission) from: Hayek, J.C. 2016. IL Big Tree Nomination Guide. Univ. of Illinois Extension, Tech. Forestry Bull. NRES-1102.

Watch next month for Part 3 of this article, which will contain details on tree identification, duties and expectations of big tree nominators, and assistance with big tree nominations.

Membership Update Sallie Krebs, Membership Coordinator

A membership e-form and our membership brochure describing the benefits of membership are both available on the chapter website (www.wildonesrrvc.org). Click on Join/Renew under the Membership tab. You can renew (or join) with any major credit card through PayPal (no PayPal account required) by using our website. We appreciate your support!!

222 memberships as of February 19, 2018

Special thanks to our members who made contributions above the basic \$40 dues!

Cynthia Chmell, Rockford
 Don & Marilyn Heneghan, Roscoe
 Rick & Jane Hoffman, Monroe Center
 Ed & Charlotte Kletecka, South Beloit
 Sallie Krebs, Cherry Valley • Mary Kuller, Rockford
 Mark & Laurie Luthin, Belvidere
 Doreen O'Brien, Oregon
 Howard Waitzkin & Mira Lee, Loves Park

62 attended the February meeting, including at least 9 guests

A big thank you to our February meeting volunteers!

Greeters: Judy Letourneau

Refreshments: Khrista Miskell, Anita Johnson

AV/Sound Equipment: Bob Arevalo

Meeting Recap: Ed Cope

Photographer: Sallie Krebs

Library Assistants: Cathy Johnson, Linda & Bob Graf

Merchandise: Cynthia Chmell

Anniversaries: 10 Years: Meryl Domina, DeKalb

In Memoriam

In memory of our former Wild Ones Rock River Valley Chapter member William "Bill" Hennessy - Member 2016-2018

It is preferred that membership renewals be sent directly to the chapter for quicker processing and to avoid delays in receiving your chapter newsletter. Remember that your dues include membership in both National Wild Ones and our chapter. Please use the address below:
 Sallie Krebs
 Wild Ones Rock River Valley
 7492 Renfro Rd., Cherry Valley, IL 61016
 Your expiration date is on your chapter newsletter above your name on the label. You will be mailed a renewal reminder from the chapter two months prior to your expiration date with a completed membership form and return envelope for your convenience.

A portion of all dues paid is returned to the chapter by National Wild Ones to support our chapter activities. National Wild Ones provides liability insurance for our meetings and events. All dues and donations are fully tax deductible.

Please send address and email address changes to the Membership Coordinator: Sallie Krebs Email: membership@wildonesrrvc.org or call (815) 540-4730 if you have any questions about membership.

Wild Ones Annual Memberships:
 Household \$40, Limited Income/Full-Time Student \$25, Affiliate Non-Profit Organization \$90, Business \$250.

Thank you for your continuing support!

2018 Chapter Programs and Events

March 15 Dragons Rule! Dragonfly ID & Info

Barbara Williams, Educator, Rock Valley College
 Severson Dells Nature Center

March to May Native Plant Sale

The woodland/wetland/prairie sale begins mid-March with the deadline for orders by April 27. The pickup dates will be May 11 and 12 at: Paulson Farm, 4601 Paulson Rd., Caledonia, IL

Unless noted, programs are free and open to the public. Programs are subject to change. For more information, contact Lisa Johnson at (779) 537.8939



NATIVE PLANTS. NATURAL LANDSCAPES

ROCK RIVER VALLEY

ROCK RIVER VALLEY CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

c/o Pambi Camacho
1643 N. Alpine Rd., Suite 104
PMB 233
Rockford, IL 61107

Don't become extinct!

If the expiration date on the mailing label is 3/1/2018, this is your last chapter newsletter and you have received your last *Wild Ones Journal* until you renew your membership. National Wild Ones drops expired memberships the first week of the expiration month, so please don't be late! See the *Membership Update* for renewal information.

Mail your renewal to:

Sallie Krebs
Wild Ones Rock River Valley
7492 Renfro Rd.
Cherry Valley, IL 61016

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Wild Ones Mission

Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes promotes environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities. Wild Ones is a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization.

Rock River Valley Chapter Meetings

Regular meetings are held the third Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at Rock Valley College, Physical Education Center PEC0110 (lower level), 3301 North Mulford Road, Rockford, 61114.

Special meetings, outings, and events are scheduled periodically and sometimes replace the regular meeting. Contact any officer to confirm information about our next meeting.

Rock River Valley Chapter Board and Coordinators

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