July 2020 - Issue 78

The Rehabilitator

BWRC NEWSLETTER

‘SQUAB’ THE DECKS!

Feral pigeon chicks rescued from HMS Defender in June!

In this issue

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A word from the Chair

Welcome to the July 2020 edition of The Rehabilitator! This month we have further proceedings from February's **'Hedgehog Rehabilitation: Sharing Best Practice'** conference run in collaboration with Hartpury University and sponsored by RSPCA and BHPS. These include an investigation into keeping disabled hedgehogs in permanent captivity from researchers at the University of Surrey and West Anglia University Centre, and an update on Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Help for Hedgehogs campaign.

Don't forget that **BWRC Symposium 2020** is coming up in November - if you or a colleague would like to contribute to the event please get in touch by e-mailing bwrcouncil@gmail.com .

How are you dealing with the shifting COVID-19 restrictions? We have **more guidance from DEFRA** – this time to Natural England regarding habitat survey work – which raises concerns about transmission of COVID-19 from human handlers to mammals. In light of this we have made a **change to our COVID-19 guidelines** – see our revised 10 point plan on page 13.

If you haven't yet done so - please do complete our survey on the **"Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of UK Wildlife Rehabilitators"** which can be found online at https://forms.gle/Pe8P6VF8wbAkq4dE8. We aim to present the results of this work at Symposium 2020.

Last month a cry for help came through the BWRC Facebook page on how to deal with a feral pigeon nest found on the Royal Navy's Type 45 Destroyer HMS Defender! See page 18 for the full story!

If you have research, experience or concerns to share, please do write in to BWRC at bwrcouncil@gmail.com or by post to PO Box 8686, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 0AG.

Terri Amory
Editor & Chair,
BWRC

Cover photo – ***A Royal Navy Leading Engineer Technician shows off two castaways found on HMS Defender in June.***

Photo courtesy of HM Royal Navy.

“The ethics and welfare implications of keeping Western European Hedgehogs in captivity”

Presented at Hedgehog Rehabilitation:
Sharing Best Practice 2020

by Sally Jones (University of Surrey)
and Stella Chapman (University Centre, West Anglia)

Saturday 1st February 2020 at Hartpury University, Gloucester.
Kindly Sponsored by RSPCA & British Hedgehog Preservation Society.

Reported by Terri Amory

Sally Jones presented the results of her research (via online questionnaire and telephone interview) into keeping disabled wild hedgehogs in permanent captivity.

Hedgehogs are thought to be the most commonly rescued wild mammal in the UK. Once in captivity their welfare is subject to the same protection as other mammals. Some rescuers choose to keep permanently disabled animals in captivity. Reasons for this

extend from reasons for rescuing wildlife in the first place, including a moral responsibility to intervene when humans have caused harm, empathy with animal suffering (independent of the cause) and species conservation. While the European hedgehog was classified as “least concern” with a stable population on the IUCN’s Red list of threatened species in 2016, there is evidence from work done by the People’s Trust for Endangered Species and others that the British hedgehog population is in decline, and this has been a focus of attention for national media.

Respondents

Sixty-six completed questionnaires were eligible for analysis in this study. The majority of respondents were based in England (one was from Scotland, two from Wales and one each from the Isle of Man and Jersey). Ten respondents described themselves as wildlife rescue centres, 42 as “one-man band” rehabilitators and 14 as members of the public who had “rehomed” a disabled hedgehog.

Hedgehogs

The 66 completed responses related to a total of 194 hedgehogs (93 male and 101 female) kept in permanent captivity. The most common reasons for permanent captivity were bilateral blindness (57 animals), hind-limb amputation (47 animals) and neurological condition (24 animals). Other categories offered included forelimb amputation (13 animals), unilateral blindness (11 animals), insufficient/total lack of spines (8 animals), too old/ cannot breed (6 animals), cannot roll up properly (6 animals) and paralysis of the spines (3 animals). Twenty-seven other disabilities were reported in ‘feedback’ including “brain damage”, “congenital limb deformities”, “snout damage”, “lung damage”, “congenital absence of spines”, “deafness” and “arthritis”.

Enclosures and environment

Six animals were reported to have been in captivity for more than five years. Exactly half of the respondents reported that their

animals were kept in a “secure garden”, while the other half reported that they used a “purpose-built pen/enclosure”. Fifty of the respondents supplied data on the space allowed (see Fig. 1). These ranged from less than 3m^2 to 28,000m^2. (The number of hedgehogs per enclosure was not collected).

Types of habitat made available to hedgehogs were reported. The majority of respondents reported that grass and/or soil were available, along with other plants including shrubs and trees. Most also provided nesting boxes and materials.

Thirteen respondents reported owning a pet dog, 28 a pet cat; 30 reported the presence of other neighbourhood cats, 19 reported the presence of foxes and three reported badgers within the captive setting. Twenty-three reported that badgers were present in the local area; 32 reported that badgers were not present locally, and 11 did not know.

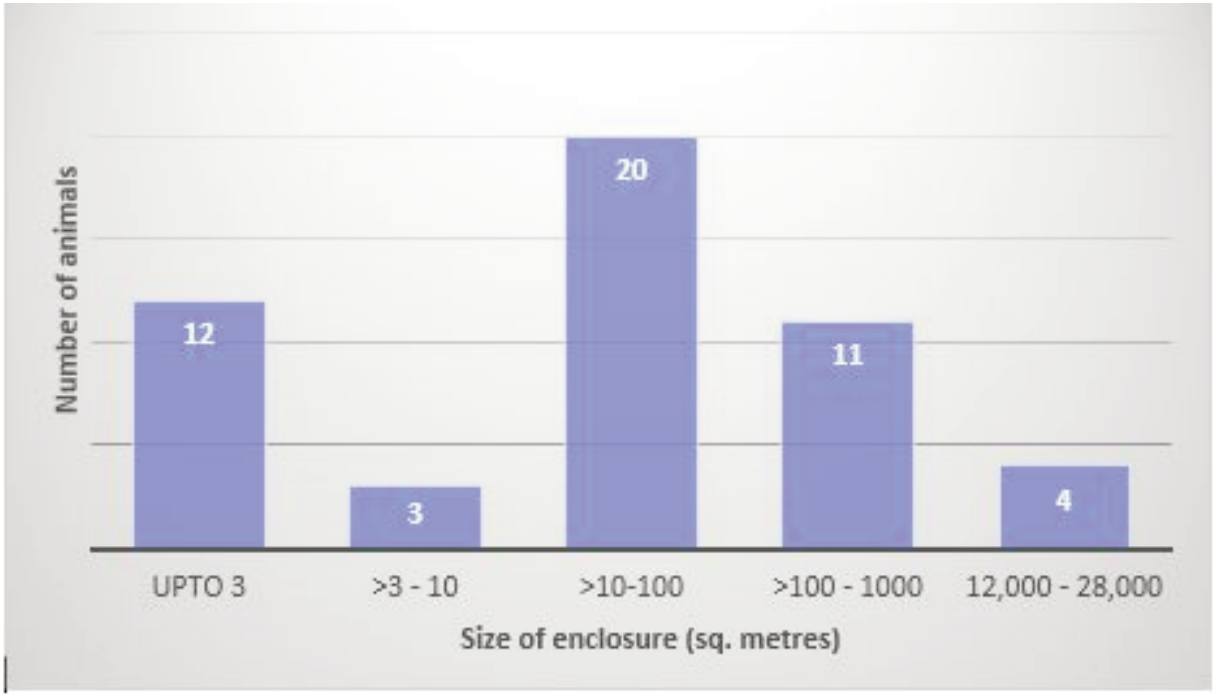

Fig. 1 Enclosure sizes reported for permanently-captive, disabled hedgehogs

Feeding

Fifty-six respondents reported that they provide food every evening, while 5 said they fed more frequently, and 5 said less frequently. Sixty-two respondents also said that natural food sources were available, while three reported that natural food was not available. Forty-six respondents reported that natural food sources were being utilized (feeding observed or faecal evidence) – 16 reported that natural food was not apparently being consumed. 65/66 respondents reported that fresh drinking water was available.

Monitoring & veterinary attention

Sixty-two respondents reported making regular health checks of their hedgehogs; 54 by direct observation, 21 by camera and 36 by faecal sampling. Twenty-six respondents reported weighing their hedgehogs at least monthly; 19 more frequently and 20 did not weigh their animals at all. Fifty animals were reported to have needed veterinary attention (24 for parasites or ringworm, 9 for respiratory conditions and 7 for bite wounds).

Human-animal interaction and conspecific behaviour

Twenty-three respondents reported human interaction with hedgehogs on a fortnightly basis, 12 on a weekly basis and 13 on a daily basis. Just over 50 respondents reported observing animals exhibiting responses of freezing, balling up and walking/running away. Huffing, thrusting spines, hissing, biting and screaming were also reported.

Forty-three respondents reported having more than one hedgehog, and 34 of those had animals of both sexes. Fourteen respondents kept animals of mixed sexes together, while 20 separated the sexes. 16/40 respondents reported courting/mating behaviour, and 6/66 respondents reported reproduction (although

two of these reports did not tie in with other data provided on numbers and sexes of hedgehogs present). 17/39 respondents reported food related aggression between hedgehogs, while 15 respondents reported non-food related aggression. Fifty-eight of 66 respondents reported hedgehogs hibernating.

Participants' opinions

Across the full sample of participants (i.e. not just those that met eligibility criteria related to experimental design) 35 respondents had a strict "no permanent captives" policy (mostly larger organizations) while 98 respondents were in favour of permanent captivity (mostly "one-man band" rescuers). Reasons that respondents gave in support of the keeping of disabled hedgehogs in permanent captivity were the potential for captive breeding to boost the wild population, the possibility of achieving a "good quality of life" in captivity and the position that disabled animals should have the same right to life as able-bodied. The list of reasons cited against keeping disabled hedgehogs was considerably longer (see table 1). Considerable variation was noted in attitudes towards captivity and appropriate outcomes for different disabilities between respondents.

Participant's reasons	(in more detail, paraphrased)
Quality of life	Stress of captivity Inability to provide natural environment Insufficient space in captivity Mixing genders means females can't avoid males Segregation frustrates the instinct to breed
Security	Difficult to guarantee especially in gardens
Commitment	Regular feeding interrupted by holidays or owner relocation

Continued...

Participant's reasons	(in more detail, paraphrased)
Resources	Space, cost etc. could be allocated to animals suitable for release
Effects of disability on welfare	Hindlimb amputation likely to inhibit removal of parasites and mating Forelimb amputation likely to inhibit walking, running, digging, nest building etc. Bilateral blindness may render animal more vulnerable to predators as unable to distinguish between day and night.

Table 1. Reasons cited by respondents against keeping disabled hedgehogs in permanent captivity

Conclusions

The authors considered that the data collection period and number of eligible responses (sample size) limited their scope for drawing firm conclusions from this study. However, a number of causes of concern for the welfare of captive disabled hedgehogs were raised by the data collected including space allowance, social groupings, unregulated captive breeding and the potential consequences of the animals' disabilities. It was suggested that more research was needed in order to establish a more standardized approach to this practice.

Citation: S.A. Jones & Stella Chapman (2019): The Ethics and Welfare Implications of Keeping Western European Hedgehogs *(Erinaceus europaeus)* in Captivity, Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science, DOI: 10.1080/10888705.2019.1672553

Lockdown answers from defra

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs

DEFRA provided the following guidance to Natural England regarding field surveying of wild animal populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not directed at wildlife rehabilitators BUT provides 'food for thought' for all who are in close proximity with mammals intended to be released back into the wild.

COVID-19 and interacting with wildlife for the purposes of field survey and mitigation works

Precautions that should be followed when interacting with mammal species for the outlined purposes are listed below –

The virus that causes COVID-19 has not been isolated from any of the UK's wild mammal species. Mammals are, however, potentially susceptible to coronaviruses so the following disease risk management precautions are advised to minimize the risk of accidentally transmitting COVID-19 from people to wild animals.

1. Make efforts to keep your distance (at least 2m) from live wild animals at all times.
2. Limit capturing or handling live wild mammals to where this is necessary.
3. Avoid sustained close proximity to (within 2m) to known dens, burrows, roosts or other breeding or regularly used resting sites of mammals, where possible

If it is not possible to follow the precautions set out above due to the nature of the activity then the following best practice advice applies:

1. Close proximity and handling of mammals should be kept to a minimum. This includes limiting the number of people that come into close proximity or handle the animals.
2. Keep animals separate from other animals, as much as reasonably possible.
3. Disposable gloves and a face covering should be worn when handling, and if you are in sustained close proximity to, any mammal.
4. Follow good hygiene practices and wash hands before and after close proximity or handling any mammal
5. All equipment should be cleaned and disinfected before and after use. Any non-disposable gloves that have been used for mammal handling and face coverings should be thoroughly washed between uses.

Advice provided by DEFRA to Natural England on 28.05.2020. Users should continue to ensure they adhere to the latest COVID advice available on www.gov.uk.

Editor's note –

Until recently advice has focussed primarily on the potential for human-human virus transmission, and the welfare of animals under the care of people who might become ill. This advice raises a separate concern of the potential for COVID-19 - thought to have originated in non-human mammals – to be passed on from infected humans to our native wildlife.

We don't currently understand the potential for COVID-19 to infect our native mammal populations, or act as reservoir of the disease. While there is no reliable evidence of any of this happening at the moment, it makes sense to take steps to avoid the possibility – if wild animal populations become infected we probably won't be able to reverse the situation!

COVID-19

BWRC 10-point plan for those working in wildlife rescue and rehabilitation

1. Staff and volunteers should work from home if possible.
2. Any staff member or volunteer who exhibits symptoms of the disease should remain at home (self-isolate) for at least 7 days, and anyone who is in contact with anyone exhibiting symptoms should self-isolate for 14 days.
3. Any staff member or volunteer who is considered vulnerable (at risk of severe illness) or extremely vulnerable should self-isolate at home, and anyone who lives with someone in those categories should stay at home.
4. Maintain closed working teams where possible - avoid mixing staff who do not routinely work together.
5. Staff should stay at least 2m (6ft) away from other staff or the public and animals wherever possible. Disposable gloves and face covering should be worn when this distance cannot be maintained.
6. Wild animals should be released as soon as possible in line with government guidelines on essential travel (as locally as possible).
7. Centre capacity should be reassessed regularly in response to changing staff availability, and measures put in place to protect animal welfare in the event of inadequate staff availability.
8. The public should be deterred from visiting your premises wherever possible and public entrances to buildings should be kept locked to prevent unauthorised entry.
9. Procedures for receiving, collecting, transferring, seeking veterinary treatment for or releasing animals should be planned and agreed in advance with all parties involved (using telephone, e-mail etc.).
10. Essential journeys include sourcing necessary supplies and transporting animals to obtain emergency care. Vehicles and equipment used off-site should be disinfected after use.

FOR MORE INFORMATION REFER TO OUR FULL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT WHICH CAN BE FOUND AT www.bwrc.org.uk

Hedgehog rehabilitation in the West Midlands

Presented at Hedgehog Rehabilitation: Sharing Best Practice 2020
by Deborah Wright, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Saturday 1st February 2020 at Hartpury University, Gloucester.
Kindly Sponsored by RSPCA & British Hedgehog Preservation Society.

Reported by Terri Amory

Deborah updated us on the progress of her work as Senior Hedgehog Officer for Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Deborah presented at our 2018 Hedgehog Carers' Conference about the Trust's "Help for Hedgehogs" campaign which was started in 2013 – engaging with local communities using Citizen Science to gather information and improve habitats for hedgehogs in the West Midlands. The campaign led to the UK's first Hedgehog Improvement Areas in the boroughs of Solihull and Rugby, funded by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society from 2015 – 2019.

Part of the focus of the Help for Hedgehogs campaign has been engagement with local hedgehog rescuers with the aim of improving relations between rehabilitators and

conservationists. Difficulties that were encountered included finding and contacting hedgehog rehabilitators, and the time commitment required from rehabilitators to fill out the forms necessary to submit their records. Of the 26 rehabilitators that Deborah located, she was only able to collect fully useable data from three of them!

Deborah was able to draw some interesting ecological conclusions from her data. These included that females were more likely to carry ectoparasites (such as ticks and fleas), while juveniles were more likely to carry endoparasites (worms and flukes) – perhaps related to the pressures of pregnancy and lactation on the females, and the inexperienced immune systems of the juveniles.

One area that would clearly benefit from the development of a standardized approach is the classification of animals into different age-groups – in particular the division between juveniles and sub-adults – terms which Deborah found were interpreted differently by different respondents. There were also variations in the extent of diagnosis – some records only included limited observable signs of disease. Deborah also suggests that collection of annual data from April to April would produce more useful data.

Deborah suspects that some rehabilitators were reluctant to engage with her research due to a distrust of both other rehabilitators and non-rehabilitators, a fear of the 'misuse' of their data (perhaps to undermine the practice of rehabilitation itself?). However, on a more positive note, one group of rehabilitators have started up their own shared database.

Deborah now has a new role with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust as Wilder Future Officer; celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Trust through promoting its volunteers – past, present and future.

Some of the difficulties associated with (and why we desperately need more) research into wildlife rehabilitation

by Terri Amory

I wanted to take this opportunity to draw together some recurrent themes have emerged from recent editions of “The Rehabilitator”.

There are often comments in scientific reports and in other forums about the lack of comprehensive information available on wildlife rehabilitation in the UK. How many wildlife rescues are there? How many animals are rescued? How many of those are released? Do these animals survive and, if so, for how long? This lack of data feeding into science makes it difficult to prove or disprove the effectiveness of many aspects of wildlife care.

Deborah’s presentation (this issue, page 12) highlighted practical difficulties with standardisation of recording, control of shared data and the additional work required for rehabilitators to feed into external databases. These are well recognised difficulties which have proven to be effective barriers against the development of a digital national recording scheme so far (alongside funding and ongoing tech support etc.).

A couple of years ago BWRC ran a pilot online questionnaire about the potential for a national wildlife rehabilitation recording scheme. Though the number of responses was low, the nature of those responses was positive; 71% of respondents said they would like to use a centrally held database if one was available. While only 29% of respondents currently used computerised records, all of those who didn't said that they would be willing to start. 100% said that they would be willing to share their data with other organisations such as BWRC or RSPCA under a data sharing agreement. However, it is likely that these results give a bit of a 'false negative' result, because those people who chose to take part in the questionnaire, probably did so because they felt positively about the idea. We are also interested to know if anyone is already using a shared database – such as the WRMD product which is being used in the US and other countries – and what you think about it?

During her work seeking out and trying to encourage rehabilitators in the West Midlands to share their data with her, Deborah also sensed an intrinsic feeling of insecurity and lack of solidarity between rehabilitators. This topic also came up in an article entitled "The human side of wildlife rehabilitation" which was sent into us – unsolicited - by an associate member and published in our March issue 74, and Pat Morris also alluded to a reluctance to collaborate in his keynote presentation at this year's Hedgehog Carer's Conference (June issue 77), when he appealed to his audience and the wider community to keep better records and share them, and to recognise that rehabilitators are all on the same side!

Sally and Stella's research into captive disabled hedgehogs (this edition page 4) highlights a spectrum of ethical stances, from euthanasia ending suffering at one end, to any life is better than death at the other. Views were expressed on the likely impacts of different disabilities on welfare, but the reported management decisions demonstrated that these are not universally shared.

Working in a field with limited published scientific evidence can make it difficult to argue some points one way or another; it may also leave some practitioners hungry for direction – as a consequence those with influence in the field need to be very careful when sharing hypotheses, so that these are not snapped up by others before they have been proven accurate (or not) by appropriate scientific study.

BWRC was born in a spirit of collaboration between people who originally thought they disagreed. Our aim remains to bring the community together to hear each other and try to build consensus about best practice for the animals we all care about. If you've ever been to one of our workshops or symposia, you'll know that disagreements do arise, but we would far rather bring people together than ostracise those who don't agree. *If you are keen to help us support you, please complete either or both of our questionnaires on Google Forms –*

"A National Wildlife Rehabilitation Recording Scheme" – https://forms.gle/cvge4R72YCayDWdX9

"Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of UK Wildlife Rehabilitators" - https://forms.gle/Pe8P6VF8wbAkq4dE8

In the News…

"Anthropause"…a unique opportunity

Scientists from across the UK are calling for colleagues to use the unique opportunity of the global reduction in human activity that we have seen since the early part of 2020 to study human-wildlife interactions in the 21st century. They have coined the phrase "anthropause" to describe the global "lockdown" period during which traffic and industrial activities have been significantly reduced.

There have been many anecdotal examples of unusual animal activity depicted on social and professional media including wild animals wandering city streets or swimming in coastal waters that would normally be too busy with human traffic. The scientists (who have published their paper in the journal "Nature, ecology and evolution") also draw attention to possible negative effects on animal species which have developed a close reliance on human activities such as those who feed on human refuse, and also the increased disturbance of green spaces which have received more human visitors as people have been seeking fresh air and an escape from being 'locked-down' at home. There may also be increases in poaching of wildlife driven by poverty and the absence of ecotourism.

The group's long term aim is to use evidence collected from animal tracking and other studies that have run through the lockdown period to develop innovative ways of mitigating the effect of normal human activities on wildlife.

Acknowledgements:
"Coronavirus: Wildlife scientists examine the great 'human pause'" by Victoria Gill, Science Correspondent, BBC News.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-53113896

Rutz, C., Loretto, M., Bates, A.E. et al. COVID-19 lockdown allows researchers to quantify the effects of human activity on wildlife. *Nat Ecol Evol* (2020).
https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-1237-z

“SQUAB” THE DECKS!

These two ‘press-ganged’ pigeons were found in their nest on board HMS Defender. (Photo courtesy of crew members).

Last month BWRC were part of a team effort to help two feral pigeon squabs that had inadvertently joined the crew of Royal Navy warship, HMS Defender!

A BWRC volunteer received a call for help in June from the wife of an Engineering Technician serving on HMS Defender via the BWRC Facebook page.

The two pigeon squabs were found in a nest on-board ship a few days after setting sail, and nobody knew how to help them. BWRC volunteer Jayne was able to provide advice on the care of the birds - bird seed or hand rearing formula weren’t available on-board ship so alternative foods had to be sourced from a kind chef.

A team of four crew members, LET Walker, ET Aitken, ET Tingle and PO Shaw took turns feeding their new feathered friends. No one knew when the ship would next dock, but a huge sigh of relief was had by all when the news came.

The ship was due to dock in Portsmouth so our volunteer liaised with Brent Lodge Wildlife Hospital near Chichester, who kindly arranged for one of their volunteers to meet two of the crew members and collect the lucky sailors! The two hungry birds were admitted, assessed and fed, but the lads on board had done a great job and the squabs were in good condition despite their adventure. The reluctant sailors are expected to make a full recovery in the expert hands of the team at Brent Lodge and be released back to the wild.

HMS Defender
(Crown Copyright)

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of UK Wildlife Rehabilitators

Thanks to everyone who has already answered our questionnaire focussed on the experiences of wildlife rehabilitators during the three month period March – May 2020, with a view to developing advice for reducing the risks associated with future events of this nature for the sector and to provide evidence with which to lobby government for support.

Please continue to share with your contacts and if you haven't already contributed the questionnaire should take no more than 20 minutes. The information that you provide will not be shared in a way which enables any individual or organisation to be identified or any data to be linked to any specific organisation without the explicit permission of the persons/ organisation involved. You will be asked questions about data consent at the beginning of the survey.

As with all studies of this nature the more contributions we gather the more useful the data will be. Please take part if you can by following this link:

https://forms.gle/Pe8P6VF8wbAkq4dE8

If you have any queries or feedback regarding this questionnaire, please contact us via bwrcouncil@gmail.com.

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BWRC would like to thank volunteer Jayne Morgan for managing our **Facebook Page**

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If you would like to submit an article or letter for publication or give a presentation at a future symposium please contact
bwrcouncil@gmail.com

The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council

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