

16 APRIL 2022, Saturday



DENR

NEWS ALERTS

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



Govt to boost protection of marine ecosystem



By [Eireene Jairee Gomez](#)

April 16, 2022

A JOINT memorandum circular between the [Department of Environment and Natural Resources](#) (DENR) and two other state agencies is expected to strengthen the establishment of marine protected area networks (MPANs), restore damaged coastal ecosystems, and enrich coral reefs and marine habitats.

This policy mandates collaboration between the DENR, [Department of Agriculture](#) (DA) and the [Department of the Interior](#) and Local Government (DILG) in improving the coastal and marine environment through cooperation.

"The eventual approval of the joint [DA-DENR-DILG] policy guidelines on the establishment and management of marine protected areas networks (MPANs) will be valuable in biodiversity conservation efforts," Dr. [Vincent Hilomen](#), SMARTSeas [PH](#) national project manager, said.

The JMC ensures that biodiversity conservation is given priority equally along with economic development.

"There will be a value for a government policy that places conservation as equally important to development and progress. Many of the degraded coastal and marine habitats resulted from the relentless push for development and progress with little afterthought of the higher costs to the environment," said Hilomen.

A joint effort of DENR, DA and DILG will help the government hurdle the difficulties of putting up MPAs and MPANs amid coastal residents' usual opposition against these.

MPAN is a collection of individual MPAs or reserves operating cooperatively and synergistically under SMARTSeas.

"One of the greatest challenges that we are experiencing in establishing MPANs is still the acceptance of the community. There are several instances where the communities resist to set aside a portion of their waters for protection purposes because they think that access to their fishing areas will be limited," said Hilomen.

It is imperative that government capacitates its MPA/MPAN workforce to empower them in harnessing cooperation from communities in establishing the protected areas and networks.

"A thorough discussion of the benefits from protection and consultation with the community from the onset is a must. The involvement of the community in protection is critical," Hilomen added.

The DENR's SMARTSeas PH project, or Strengthening Marine Protected Areas to Conserve Marine Key Biodiversity Areas in the [Philippines](#), is funded under a \$28.53-million co-financing scheme between government and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It also received a GEF grant of \$8 million.

The SMARTSeas PH has so far capacitated at least 70 key DENR regional and field staff through online distance learning.



Govt to boost protection of marine ecosystem

This is the first-ever of its kind capacity building activity in the DENR. The increased competencies included identification and approaches to resolving threats to the marine environment.

The establishment of three MPANs led to the development of nearly 90 management bodies of MPAs and MPANs that have demonstrated increased competencies for management effectiveness.

SMARTSeas has also developed a better monitoring and evaluation system for MPAs and MPANs, which provided an important guide to monitor management progress across the country. Protection of coastal ecosystems under the MPA includes patrolling, surveillance of habitats, conduct of direct activities and repair of signages, other facilities, gears and equipment.



Campaign posters placed on trees removed



ZAMBOANGA. The Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO)-Liloy in coordination with the Commission on Elections (Comelec), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), and the police conduct “Oplan Baklas” removing campaign materials placed on tree in the municipal boundaries of Salug, Labason, and Tampilisan, Zamboanga del Norte. The posting of campaign materials on trees is prohibited under election regulations. (SunStar Zamboanga)

April 14, 2022

- A A +

THE Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO)-Liloy in coordination with the Commission on Elections (Comelec), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), and the police conducted “Oplan Baklas” in the province of Zamboanga del Norte, an official said Thursday, April 14, 2022.

Cidur Julsadjiri, Zamboanga del Norte Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer (PENRO), said the Oplan Baklas was conducted Monday, April 11, 2022, along the municipal boundaries of Salug, Labason and Tampilisan.

Julsadjiri said that campaign is in compliance to the Memorandum of DENR Secretary Jim Sampulna to intensify an environmentally-conscious national campaign by prohibiting the posting or nailing of campaign materials on trees.

“Oplan Baklas is being implemented nationwide under a DENR-COMELEC- DILG Joint Memorandum for a joint implementation and tear down or confiscate campaign materials posted on trees,” Julsadjiri said.



Campaign posters placed on trees removed

Dionisio Rago, head of Cenro-Liloy, said that the collected signages, tarpaulin, posters and other election campaign materials were turned-over to the Municipal Police Station of Liloy for inventory and assessment.

Rago added that Oplan Baklas is in compliance with Republic Act No. 3571 and Presidential Decree 953 wherein it prohibits posting or installing campaign materials on trees, anyone found guilty of violating this law may be imprisoned, fined, or both.

He said they will work closely with concerned government agencies to ensure the success of an environmentally-conscious national election. (**SunStar Zamboanga**)



Climate body eyes closer ties with UPLB



By [Eireene Jairee Gomez](#)

April 15, 2022

THE [Climate Change Commission](#) (CCC) wants to tighten a collaboration with the University of the [Philippines](#) Los Baños (UPLB) as part of a strategic partnership program involving state universities and colleges (SUCs).

During a visit to the [Interdisciplinary Studies Center](#) for Water (ISCW) at the [UPLB School of Environmental Science and Management](#) (Sesam), CCC chief [Robert E.A. Borje](#) highlighted the important roles played by the academe and research institutions in "building national capacities for climate change adaptation and mitigation."

"UPLB's Sesam and ISCW are well-placed to provide a deeper and fuller understanding of the Philippines' water resources and the ways forward to use and manage them sustainably and harness them properly to support the country's climate change action agenda," Borje said.

He thanked [Patricia Ann Sanchez](#), a member of a national panel of experts and ISCW chairman, for sharing data on rainfall projections and other information pertinent to the CCC's work, particularly with regard to a case study on flooding in Masantol, Pampanga.

"There is a compelling task for us to do more than what we are doing right now, especially [in] mainstreaming climate change and in harnessing local experience and expertise as we work to combat climate change," Borje said.

"As the lead agency in the formulation and coordination of relevant policies, the CCC looks to stronger partnerships with SUCs for science-based and data-based driven policy recommendations."

Sanchez noted that the data being provided by the ISCW covered the whole Pampanga River Basin.

Sesam [Dean Rico Ancog](#), meanwhile, said the UPLB was looking forward to continued engagement with the CCC.

"This is what we are doing, teaching and academic research. We're serious about doing good research, but we want this to be something, a platform that could be for a lifetime," he said.

"One thing we can really provide is the more holistic research, so this is really a good start to support the work of the Climate Change Commission."

Borje noted that the academe and research institutions were also helping local government units better understand climate and disaster risks in order to formulate more appropriate plans of action.

"This is only the start of what a stronger partnership should be in the next few years, not just on research, but also in the implementation of climate adaptation projects," he said.



Mount Hamiguitan in Davao Oriental reopened to trekkers

Published April 13, 2022, 5:26 PM

by [Antonio Colina IV](#)

DAVAO CITY – The Mount Hamiguitan Range Wildlife Sanctuary (MHRWS) has been reopened to trekkers and mountaineers for the first time since it was closed at the start of Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020.

The Department of Tourism (DOT)-Davao director Tanya Rabat-Tan said the reopening of Mount Hamiguitan would boost efforts to promote the region as “top-of-mind destination for culture, adventure and nature.”

Mount Hamiguitan is expected to attract not only mountaineers but also naturalists and environmentalists from all over the country, she added.

Mt. Hamiguitan was inscribed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage site on June 23, 2014 and declared as Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) Heritage Park on October 21, 2014.

Following the approval of Protected Area Management Board (PAMB), the Protected Area Management Office (PAMO) of the MHRWS announced that bookings have been reopened since April 11 to trekkers and mountaineers who wish to scale up Mount Hamiguitan.

Based on the simplified guidelines for trekking, mountaineering, and other activities in MHRWS, the allowed number of trekkers in every trekking duration of three days on campsites excluding the eco-guides and porters has been reduced from 30 to 15.

It said in a statement that it would accept organized bookings only from its accredited climb organizer, JM Boundless Adventure Tour Assistance Services, which is operated by John Meryl G. Jayno.

It added that individuals may also organize their own group climbs after review of requirements and verification of trekkers.

“We are delighted with the announcement of the Protected Area Management Board of Mount Hamiguitan Range Wildlife Sanctuary with regards to the reopening of Mt Hamuiguitan in Davao Oriental,” Rabat-Tan said.

The official reminded the trekkers to preserve Mount Hamiguitan, urging the visitors to practice responsible mountain climbing by adhering to “all Leave No Trace principles.”

“With such honor, we are also obligated with the formidable task of protecting this treasured wildlife sanctuary, touted to have one of the richest biodiversity in the country,” she said.

She added that trekkers must ensure that they follow the necessary safety measures.

“This will not only minimize our impact in Hamiguitan’s lush forest but also ensure safety in our journey. With simple tasks, such as sticking to a single trail, respecting local flora and fauna, and taking your trash back, we can help preserve this area of natural beauty for many years to come,” she added.



Mount Hamiguitan in Davao Oriental reopened to trekkers

The Mt. Hamiguitan Range Wildlife Sanctuary, declared a protected area under RA 9303, measures 16,923 hectares covering San Isidro Municipality, Governor Generoso, and Mati City.

Recorded species on Mt. Hamiguitan are 963 species of flora and 440 species of fauna, 341 of which are endemic to the Philippines.

The plants include 729 angiosperms, 27 conifers, 164 ferns and allies, 17 mosses, 13 liverworts, and 13 lichens while the known fauna include 15 species of non-flying mammals, 11 species of flying mammals, 108 species of birds, 33 species of reptiles, 18 species of frogs, 142 species of butterflies, 31 species of dragonflies and damselflies, 46 species of spiders, four species of earthworms, 15 species of nematodes, and 17 species of freshwater fish.



Rare whale dies in Davao Oriental after 'abuse' by locals

ABS-CBN News

Posted at Apr 15 2022 08:03 PM



Courtesy of Darrell Blatchley

A rare whale species was found dead along the shoreline of Banaybanay town in Davao Oriental on Wednesday after it was allegedly maltreated by locals.

It was first found alive in the shallow seawater after it was stranded on a beachline on Sunday.

Davao City-based marine biologist Darrell Blatchley, who responded to determine the cause of whale's death and to preserve its bones, said the 15-foot long female marine mammal is a Hotaula Beaked Whale.

"It is one of 20 or less ever seen in the whole world. It was only listed as a new whale in 2013," he told ABS-CBN News.

Blatchley said nearby residents did not treat the whale well, which led to its death.

"The whale was an attraction for the days it was alive. Sadly, people in the area did not treat it with respect when it was alive," Blatchley said

"In fact, it was reported to us that a politician paid P1,000 to the locals to ride the sick whale. We won't name the politician. They know who they are," he added.

The whale was chopped up unceremoniously after three days of torment in the shoreline.

The necropsy of the whale is ongoing to determine the cause of its death.

Blatchley hopes people will take care of stranded marine mammals by immediately calling the authorities for help, and avoid unnecessary interaction.

He also called for proper plastic disposal as plastic ingestion is one of the leading causes of death of marine mammals.—**Report from Hernel Tocmo**

Source: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/15/22/rare-whale-dies-in-davao-oriental-after-abuse-by-locals?fbclid=IwAR2UpMCPeZPxxJI93LMh3FcM8oA5utsWoFoHgT-r8XDjbM46DiQWZctmQDg>



A blazing orange wildflower thought to be extinct for 36 years was rediscovered

By Megan Marples, CNN

Updated 1638 GMT (0038 HKT) April 15, 2022



Botanists discovered clusters of *Gasteranthus extinctus* in western Ecuador while conducting field research.

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(CNN)A rare blazing orange wildflower that was thought to be extinct for 36 years was rediscovered in South America.

The wildflower *Gasteranthus extinctus* has only been spotted in Ecuador's cloud forest and was last documented in 1985, according to a [new study in the journal PhytoKeys](#). The researchers saw a dim future for the flower, so they named it "extinctus" because they believed it would soon die out, said coauthor Dawson White, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Field Museum in Chicago.

Most of the cloud forest suffered deforestation in the years that followed. The habitat loss was thought to have killed off dozens of species, White said.

Researchers decided to take another look in western Ecuador in 2021 to see if there were any patches of forest left and to search for the species that had lived there. Within days, the flower was found, White said.

"It was total elation because *Gasteranthus extinctus* is a symbol of these unique forests," White said.

The team gathered samples to later confirm the DNA of the plant, which was scattered in clumps in the small sections of remaining forest.



A blazing orange wildflower thought to be extinct for 36 years was rediscovered

A serendipitous moment

After the magnificent rediscovery, team member Riley Fortier checked the nature app [iNaturalist](#) to see if anyone else had taken a similar photo, White said. A joint initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society, iNaturalist is a biodiversity observation network where people can post photos of plants, birds and other findings in nature for help with identification.

The researchers found photos of the wildflower posted in 2019 by a group of Ecuadorian students who had been enjoying an outing in a small conservation area.

"They were out on a trip a little north of where we were collecting and sure enough, they took two pictures of *Gasteranthus extinctus*, but they weren't able to identify it as such," White said.

He was able to track down the students to learn more details about their encounter and to include their observations in the scientific paper.

Gasteranthus extinctus is not well known in Ecuador, but another member of its family, the African violet, is, said Carmen Ulloa Ulloa, botanist and curator at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis. She was not involved in the study.

"Many people probably have an African violet from Africa in their homes, but very few of the Ecuadorian native plants are cultivated for ornamentals," she said.

Working against the clock

While no longer considered extinct, the wildflower is still endangered, White said.

Despite the devastation the cloud forest is suffering, the Ecuadorian government continues to destroy the forest for their own gain, which wreaked havoc in that part of the country, he explained.

The originally Ecuadorian government redistributed the land to the working class in the 1950s and 1960s, White said.

People cut down trees to make way for growing crops like cacao beans and bananas, most of which end up in the United States, he added.

"We were with local landowners, and they told us about their plans to continue to cut down some of these small forests that still remain," White said.

Ulloa Ulloa grew up in Ecuador and saw firsthand the deforestation, but as she became an adult, she understood the delicate balance of needing to protect the environment while finding ways to make money.

"You need to protect the forest, but then you also need to feed the population of the country," Ulloa Ulloa said.

One solution is to invest in ecotourism, which invites tourists to enjoy the natural land, she said. It's a way to protect the forest while boosting Ecuador's economy, Ulloa Ulloa explained.



A blazing orange wildflower thought to be extinct for 36 years was rediscovered

Research teams who traveled to Ecuador before and after White's team discovered nearly half a dozen plant species new to science. The teams who discovered the new species are hoping to publish their findings later this year, he said.

White's goals are to [conserve the environment of the cloud forest](#) while continuing inventory on the newly discovered species, he said.

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Philippines logs 272 new cases of COVID-19 on Good Friday

ABS-CBN News

Posted at Apr 15 2022 07:52 PM

MANILA — The Philippines logged 272 new cases of COVID-19 on Good Friday, with 100 of the tally originating from the National Capital Region, the Department of Health said.

The DOH also recorded 24 new deaths due to COVID-19.

The April 15 log is the sixth straight day with less than 300 new cases, according to the DOH.

Total active cases stand at 23,199, the lowest since January 2, based on official data.

The Philippines has recorded 3.682 million coronavirus cases since the pandemic began.

The DOH earlier reminded the public to continue complying with minimum public health standards, as Filipinos travel home or for vacation during the Holy Week.

It warned that a rise in infections is still possible, despite relatively lower cases in recent weeks.



Omicron XE is spreading in the UK: Virologist explains what we know about this hybrid variant

By <https://theconversation.com/profiles/grace-c-roberts-1138336>

- April 15, 2022 - 5:12 PM



Artwork of Omicron variant of COVID-19 from Pixabay

As the COVID pandemic has progressed, we've repeatedly seen the arrival of new viral variants. Variants of concern, such as delta and omicron, are versions of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) which have acquired mutations. These mutations can provide SARS-CoV-2 with a genetic advantage – so for example, delta is linked to [more serious illness](#) than the original Wuhan strain, while [omicron is more infectious](#).

Now we are seeing recombinant variants such as [omicron XE](#). These are not viruses which have picked up a few mutations. Instead, they are viruses containing a combination of genetic material from multiple variants, producing a new version of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

So far there have been at least 1,179 cases of omicron XE identified in the UK (this was the figure in [the most recent update](#) from the UK Health Security Agency published on April 8). The majority of these cases have been in the south and east of England. There have also been reports of a handful of cases [elsewhere around the world](#), likely due to international travel.

So how worried should we be about omicron XE? While we don't know a lot about it yet, what we do know doesn't suggest there's cause for serious concern. Let's take a look.

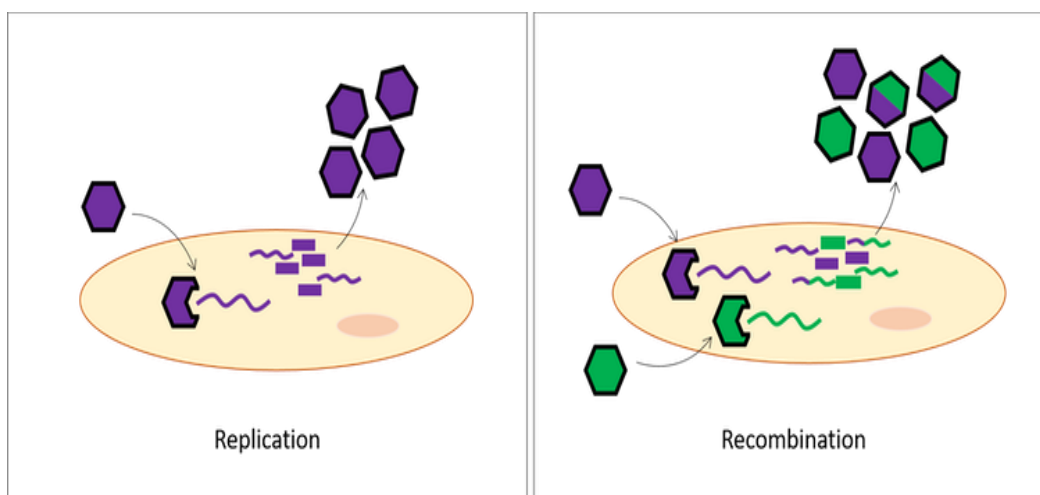
A bit about recombinant variants

When viruses replicate, they sometimes make mistakes in their genetic code leading to individual mutations. Often, these mutations don't result in any change to the structure of the virus – termed "[silent mutations](#)". Some mutations, however, can confer an advantage. For example, mutations that occur in the spike protein (the part of SARS-CoV-2 responsible for infecting our cells) can make the virus [more transmissible](#) than previous variants. We've seen repeated mutations in the spike protein producing [variants of concern](#).



Omicron XE is spreading in the UK: Virologist explains what we know about this hybrid variant

Recombination is a different process, whereby two different variants infect the same cell, in the same person, at the same time. From there, they can [combine their genetic material](#), resulting in a virus that possesses a mix of genes from both infecting “parent” viruses. This recombinant variant may then spread to other people – as has been the case with omicron XE.



Recombination occurs when two different variants infect the same cell at the same time.
Grace C. Roberts, Author provided

In fact, multiple recombinant variants have been identified globally by [PANGOLIN](#) (the SARS-CoV-2 lineage surveillance carried out by the COVID-19 genetics UK consortium). At least three of these – XD, XE and XF – have been detected in the UK.

Some recombinants, such as XD and XF, are combinations of the delta variant with omicron lineages. You might have heard of these hybrids, which have been dubbed “[deltacron](#)”. XE, however, is a combination of two omicron strains: BA.1 and BA.2.

Why do different variants combine?

Genetic recombination of viruses is [not a new phenomenon](#). It occurs regularly with viruses such as [influenza](#) and [HIV](#). Indeed, one of the proposed origins of the original Wuhan SARS-CoV-2 virus is from a [recombination event in bats](#).

From an evolutionary perspective, recombination offers viruses an advantage, as it allows more [rapid and significant changes to the virus](#), compared with the slower process of acquiring mutations through errors in replication. Recombinant viruses can exhibit marked changes in their behaviour, such as increased infectiousness, evasion of our existing immunity to the virus, or resistance to drugs. Much like error-based mutation, however, some recombinant viruses show no apparent differences to their parent viruses.

We know that omicron XE has the [majority of its genetic information](#), including the spike protein, from the omicron sub-variant BA.2, which is the variant [predominating in the UK](#) at the moment. It is likely, therefore, that the characteristics of omicron XE (such as transmissibility, severity of



Omicron XE is spreading in the UK: Virologist explains what we know about this hybrid variant

disease and vaccine efficacy) are similar to those of BA.2. But it's prudent that scientists continue to monitor and study omicron XE, as it is a genetically distinct virus from its parents.

Initial data for the omicron XE variant suggests that the growth rate (that is, the proportion of new infections in the population) [is slightly higher](#) than that of omicron BA.2. However, because there are only a small number of infections with XE at present, the data we have on this is limited and it's difficult to draw solid conclusions for now.

Reassuringly, we know that BA.2 is [no more severe than BA.1](#), and that omicron variants overall tend to cause [less severe disease](#) than previous SARS-CoV-2 variants. But they are highly infectious.

The need for updated vaccines is becoming ever-pressing since all current vaccines are based on the original Wuhan strain. Data has shown that the more changes in the spike protein subsequent variants have acquired, the less effective our current vaccines are [at preventing infection](#). That said, vaccines are still very effective at preventing severe disease or death from COVID.

Of course, we need more research to understand the characteristics of this new omicron XE strain. But it appears, at present, to be very similar to the current circulating strains of SARS-CoV-2. As we well know, it's not the first variant of the virus, and it's highly unlikely to be the last.

[Grace C Roberts](#), Research Fellow in Virology, [University of Leeds](#). This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

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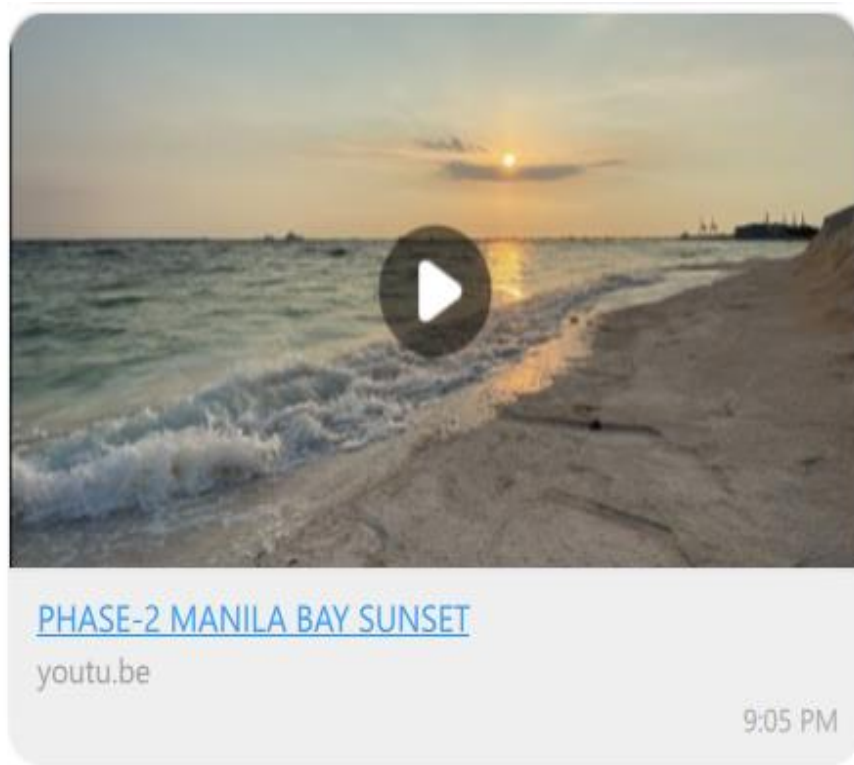
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



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