

# The Bugle

*Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!*

Volume 45, Number 1

February 2019

## One is the Loneliest Number

*By Claire Mirande,  
Director of Conservation  
Networking*

Each year since 2006, a lone male Siberian Crane makes the long journey from the arctic tundra down to his winter home at Fereydoonkenar, a small wetland on the south coast of the Caspian Sea. The local people search the skies each November anxiously awaiting his arrival. The news of his return is heralded around the world! This beloved

bird is called Omid, meaning *hope* in Farsi. He is the last Siberian Crane in Iran. And while our hearts rejoice at Omid's miraculous return each year, they also cry out asking why it takes such a poignant loss to make the changes needed to protect the wildlife that enriches our lives and our lands.

*Continued on page 2*

*Photo by Sam Lei*



Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
With your one wild and precious life?

*– Mary Oliver*



*Read about  
Dr. George  
Archibald's  
expedition to  
remote Yakutia  
on page 3*

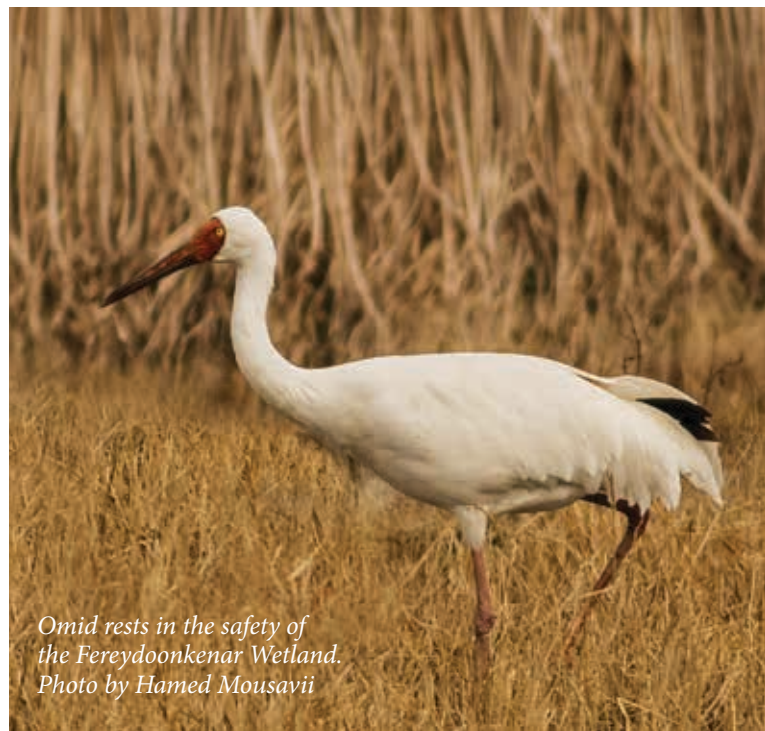
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Omid is one of only 4,000 Critically Endangered Siberian Cranes left on Earth. Almost all of them live in the eastern flyway, where they nest in arctic Russia and migrate to wintering areas in southern China at Poyang Lake. Sadly, Omid's population in Western/Central Asia has seriously declined over the past four decades to just 20-25 birds due to unregulated hunting and loss of habitat. These remaining birds were seen from 2013-2017 along migration routes in Kazakhstan and Russia, or on historical breeding areas in Russia. Unfortunately, their current wintering areas are unknown. Omid returns to Iran where he wintered in the past with other Siberian Cranes awaiting their return.

In the 1970s, our Co-Founder Dr. Ron Sauey studied 200 Siberian Cranes that wintered in India. Despite intervention on their behalf, that population dwindled, and the last pair was seen in 2002. In 1978, Dr. George Archibald received permission to visit the Caspian lowlands where he found a group of 10-14 Siberian Cranes at Fereydoonkenar. The grandparents of Omid may well have been among the cranes Dr. Archibald observed that day. Unfortunately, this sub-group of the western population has slowly disappeared most likely due to shootings along their arduous flyway, and now Omid flies alone.

But Omid's message has not been lost. In Iran, a collaboration between the traditional duck trappers at Fereydoonkenar and the Mazandaran Crane Conservation Association, founded by our colleague Ellen Vuosalo Tavakoli, was instrumental in raising awareness of the importance of these wetlands for Siberian Cranes and other migratory waterfowl. The duck-trapping site is now listed as an *Indigenous Community Conserved Area*, and Fereydoonkenar wetlands are registered as a *Ramsar Wetland of International Importance* and a *Non-Shooting Area* by the Department of Environment. Omid spends his winter days there safe and adored.

From 2002-2009, we developed and implemented a regional Siberian Crane Wetlands Project, with support from the United Nations Environment Program / Global Environment Facility, to reverse the



Omid rests in the safety of the Fereydoonkenar Wetland. Photo by Hamed Mousavii

prevailing trend of losing birds and wetlands. The goal was to slow down the pace of wetland loss and threats to Siberian Cranes along the two migratory routes. This unparalleled international effort spanned two continents and 16 sites in China, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Iran.

Now, with help from the Disney Conservation Fund, we are working intensely along the eastern flyway to prevent Siberian Cranes from disappearing from that population. We are protecting important wetlands that Siberian Cranes use on their long migrations so that no crane ever has to be the last of its kind to make the journey. We are grateful to all our members and supporters for making this work possible, and most of all, to the local champions for their passion and caring!



Map by Dorn Moore

# Okhotsky Perevoz

By George Archibald, Co-Founder



**October 2, 2018**

It's 4:30 a.m., and I'm wide awake and brimming with anticipation to see and hear Siberian Cranes in this remote place. I dress quickly and tiptoe outside.



The tiny, isolated village of Okhotsky Perevoz in Yakutia is particularly intriguing to me because the entire eastern population of Siberian Cranes migrates over or near the village. Getting there was no easy task – it took two days just from Yakutsk, the capital of Yakutia. The first day included a ferry across the Lena River, a five-hour drive on bumpy roads, and another long wait for a ferry across the Aldan River. The next day was a cold and windy upstream journey in two small motorboats, but finally, we made it. Okhotsky Perevoz (OP) is the former trading center between the interior of eastern Siberia and the outside world before roads and railways were built. The human population of the region is in decline, and OP now has only about 100 inhabitants from a peak of several thousand.

OP rests in the boreal forest zone between the treeless tundra where the Siberian Cranes breed and the plains of northeast China where they rest at Momoge Nature Reserve for about a month during their 3,500-mile migration to and from their winter home at Poyang Lake in China. Just north of OP, the cranes fly across several mountain ranges before converging over the village upon reaching the Aldan River that flows directly south toward China.

Alexi and Rosa Zelepukhin were our hosts in OP. They live beside a tiny meteorological station on the Aldan River. Now retired, Rosa was the director of the meteorological station. Lovers of the wilderness, they were always thrilled by the massive migrations of waterfowl and cranes. Rosa kept records of their numbers. Later she met professional ornithologists and was amazed to discover the cranes were endangered, and their migration corridor was narrow. She viewed the cranes through new eyes and enlisted the involvement of others in organized surveys. They discovered the counts in autumn were much higher than in spring, and the majority of the flocks flew over their village in late September and early October. Thanks to Rosa, we now know that an autumn count at OP is perhaps the most efficient way to monitor the size of the eastern population!



Our warm welcome! Left to right: Rosa, Jennifer, Alexi, and Dr. Masha Vladimirtsova

Upon arrival, Alexi and Rosa were in their rustic winter home preparing a meal of homemade bread, fried fish, and a soup of beef, onions, cabbage, and potatoes. After

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the long journey and hearty meal, I retired for a long rest in a cozy bed. I was eager to begin the next day looking for Siberian Cranes, despite the doubts of my colleague Dr. Nikolai Germogenov from the Institute for Biological Problems of the Cryolithozone (IBPC) in Yakutia, Russia. He predicted it would take a blast of winter to push the cranes from their staging areas on the tundra.

We had only the next two days to look for cranes. Would they appear?

After tiptoeing out, I walked for an hour in the moonlight along the gravel shoreline of the river. The silence was broken only by a few moos from a cow, followed by a chorus of barking dogs. A few crows and a raven called, and a lone wild goose honked as it flew south. I returned to the cabin for a hearty breakfast and joined my colleagues Masha of the IBPC, and Jennifer, from our board of directors. We walked north along the riverbank until we reached a spot with a commanding view in all directions – Masha’s favorite spot for counting Siberian Cranes.

Facing the east and seated on the grassy bank, we waited in silence broken only by a small flock of redpolls, a sparrow-sized bird of the Arctic. Then at 9:45 a.m. from the north, we were thrilled to hear the faint flute-like calls of Siberian Cranes. We jumped to our feet and scanned the clear blue morning sky with our binoculars. Masha cried, “Look up!” Above us, 28 sets of glistening white wings stroked effortlessly across the still, cold air before they vanished beyond the forest of white birch. We were speechless. We remained at our post until mid-afternoon, but no more cranes appeared. Colleagues upstream spotted 14 more cranes, and later we learned that villagers on the east side of the river had sighted 12 more.

We visited the local school that evening. Masha created baseball hats with cranes for the boys and crane bags for the girls. The students were so excited. With everyone gathered around, I showed dramatic videos of cranes doing interesting things as Masha translated. Our party ended with treats from Sergei, the cook.

The next day, not a crane appeared. On the same day in 2017, hundreds of Siberian Cranes poured over OP. The unseasonably warm weather slowed the migration. Nikolai was right! I was sad to bid farewell to our gracious hosts, but I promised to return and spend two weeks to participate in a thorough 2019 count of these beautiful birds we are working so hard to save. A few days later, Rosa called Masha to report that more than 1,000 Siberian Cranes had flown over her home!

## Ways to Celebrate Cranes in 2019

Just because our site is closed this season for renovation, doesn't mean you can't enjoy cranes at festivals and events around the world.



He Yuanming

### MARCH 2019

**Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival** | Kearney, NE  
ne.audubon.org/

**Marsh Madness** | Linton, IN – Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area  
friendsofgoosepond.org/

**Monte Vista Crane Festival** | Monte Vista, CO  
https://mvcranefest.org/

**Othello Sandhill Crane Festival** | Othello, WA  
www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/

### APRIL 2019

**Annual Midwest Crane Count** | Saturday, April 13, 2019  
www.cranecount.org

**AZA Party for the Planet Volunteer Work Day** | International Crane Foundation  
Saturday, April 20, 2019  
Registration required. www.savingcranes.org

### MAY 2019

**Horicon Marsh Bird Festival** | Mayville, WI  
www.horiconmarsh.org/

### JUNE 2019

**An Evening with the Cranes** | International Crane Foundation  
Saturday, June 15, 2019. www.savingcranes.org

**Annual Mongolian Crane Festival** | Mongolia  
wsc.org.mn/

### AUGUST 2019

**Birdfair** | Egleton, Rutland, UK  
birdfair.org.uk/

### SEPTEMBER 2019

**Yampa Valley Crane Festival** | Steamboat Springs & Hayden, CO  
coloradocranes.org/

**Greater Yellowstone Crane Festival** | Driggs, ID  
tetonlandtrust.org/

**Whooping Crane Festival** | Princeton, WI  
www.cityofprincetonwi.com/

**Member Appreciation Day and Annual Member Meeting**  
International Crane Foundation  
Saturday, September 21, 2019  
www.savingcranes.org

### NOVEMBER 2019

**Festival of Cranes** | San Antonio, New Mexico  
www.friendsofbosquedelapache.org

**Bhutan Crane Festival** | Phobjikha Valley, Bhutan  
www.rspnbhutan.org/

**Lodi Sandhill Crane Festival** | Lodi, CA  
www.cranefestival.com

## Notes from the President

By Rich Beilfuss  
State of the Cranes



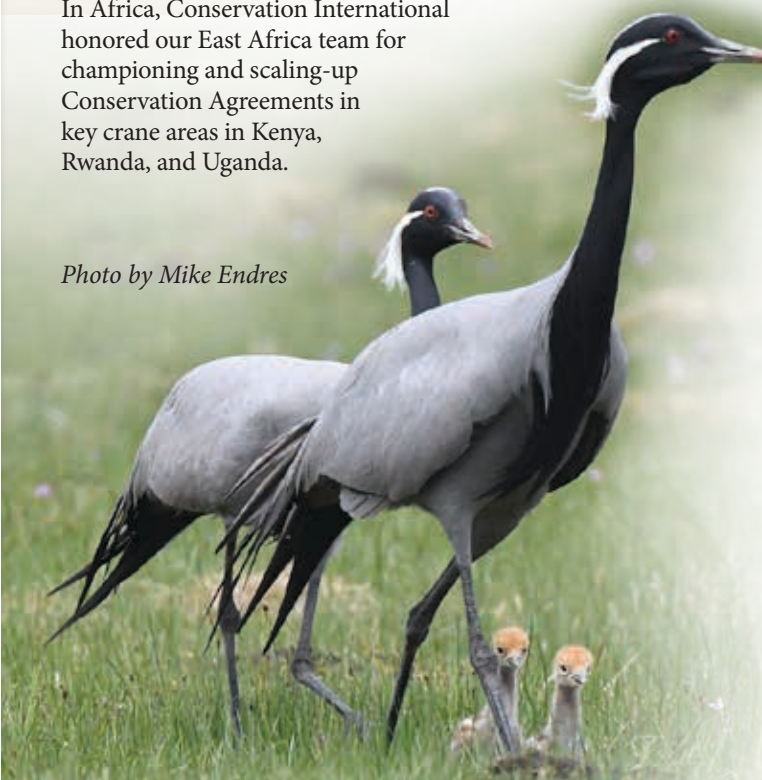
The start of a new year is always a great time to take stock of the joys and sorrows of the past year.

We had much to celebrate in 2018! Critically Endangered Siberian Cranes had a very good year along their 3,000-mile flyway from the Russian Arctic to southeastern China. Record numbers of Siberian Cranes migrated through Northeast China – where habitat conditions were optimal for them thanks in part to the improved wetland management practices we've introduced in the region and at Poyang Lake. We also worked with Russian colleagues to upgrade Kytalyk Nature Reserve to a National Park, ensuring lasting protection for Siberian Crane breeding grounds. Healthy wetlands all along the flyway – like pearls on a necklace – foretell a better future for Siberian Cranes and the wealth of species who depend on them.

We also celebrated new gains this past year for the world's tallest flying bird, the Sarus Crane. We led our 15th annual training session of the Mekong Wetland University Network, building strong local capacity to manage and restore wetlands that are vital to Sarus Cranes throughout Southeast Asia. Our teams in India and Nepal tracked more than 800 pairs of Sarus Cranes to understand better how people, agriculture, and wildlife can co-exist so harmoniously in this densely populated region. In Australia, we led the most comprehensive study ever undertaken of the breeding success of Sarus Cranes, and their cousins the Brolgas. In the coming year, we will deepen our efforts to safeguard Sarus Crane breeding grounds in the forested wetlands of northern Cambodia, and launch an important new program in Myanmar on the naturally flooded rice fields of the Ayeyarwady Delta.

In Africa, Conservation International honored our East Africa team for championing and scaling-up Conservation Agreements in key crane areas in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.

Photo by Mike Endres



Through these agreements, rural communities commit to protecting Grey Crowned Cranes and other biodiversity on their farmlands in exchange for meaningful investments in their livelihoods, health, and education.

On the great floodplains of southern Africa, Wattled Crane numbers continued to increase, reaching their highest numbers in more than 30 years on the Kafue Flats in Zambia. With the help of local communities, we cleared hundreds of hectares of invasive shrubs from the flats and launched a national campaign to prevent illegal mining, poaching, and other damaging activities to the floodplain. We conducted the first-ever aerial survey of the water towers of east Angola to help secure the headwaters of the mighty Zambezi and Okavango Rivers that sustain most of the world's Wattled Cranes and many other species of iconic African wildlife.

Here at home, the naturally occurring flock of Whooping Cranes that migrates between Canada and Texas topped 500 individuals for the first time in over a century – bringing us more than halfway to our goal of at least 1,000 individuals in the wild. Our efforts to reintroduce two self-sustaining flocks of Whooping Cranes took a big step forward too. A record five Whooping Crane chicks successfully migrated with their families from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin to the southeastern U.S., and another five new chicks fledged from nests in Louisiana.

Among the flourish of activity at our global headquarters in Baraboo throughout the year, we were especially excited to break ground on the grand renovation of our visitor experience. When we re-open to the public in 2020, visitors will be greeted in our new gateway visitor center and encounter ten new and natural exhibits celebrating cranes as ambassadors for conservation around the world.

But 2018 was not without great sorrows too. In September, we lost our dear friend and colleague Jim Harris, who dedicated so much of his life to the International Crane Foundation and especially the cranes, wetlands, and people of China. This loss is heartbreaking and still raw, but soon, we will share tears and fond memories of Jim at a special public ceremony.

Crane poisonings in China and Cambodia, and another senseless shooting of a Whooping Crane in Louisiana were stark reminders of the effort it takes to keep these small crane populations on the steady road to recovery. And we continue to face threats to our wetlands and waters at an alarming scale, exacerbated by a changing climate that is hitting hard in many important cranes areas—from Southern Africa to the Southwest U.S.

There is still so much work to be done – but I draw hope and inspiration from our great team at the International Crane Foundation, the dedicated partners we work with around the world, and all we achieved together in 2018. I look forward to a productive year ahead. As always, we can't do it without you. Thank you for being there with us.

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The Bugle is the quarterly newsletter of the International Crane Foundation. ICF was founded in 1973 by Ronald Sauey, Ph.D. (1948 - 1987) and George Archibald, Ph.D.

### Editor: Betsy Didrickson

Bugle comments or questions? Please write Betsy at [Bugle@savingcranes.org](mailto:Bugle@savingcranes.org) or P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913

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# Excitement is Building!

*By Darcy Love, Project Manager - Site Renovation*

While the official start of winter has come and gone, until now the weather in Baraboo, Wisconsin more closely resembled late fall. Our exhibit renovation project benefitted enormously from this delayed onset of cold, snow, and ice. Most of the footings and foundations for the new buildings, including our new visitor center and keeper buildings for the exhibit cranes, have been poured and backfilled. Walls are built, trusses ordered, and framing will begin as soon as the roof structures are on their way. All the underground infrastructure is nearly complete, and with winter weather bearing down on us, the cold won't hold up progress for the "above ground" work to be done. We are on track and making steady progress.

We are excited to share the changes with you, and there's nothing better than time-lapse photography to do just that. We will post compelling time-lapse videos of this project on our website twice monthly at [savingcranes.org/renovation-time-lapse](http://savingcranes.org/renovation-time-lapse)



# Our Journey Continues With Your Help!

Together, we've made great progress to protect cranes and the places they call home. But, we still have so much to do. With your help, we will work strategically with our partners around the world to continue having profound **impact** on the five continents and over 60 countries where we work.



*Photo by John Ford*

## In North America...

**OUR GOAL:** Protect Whooping Cranes and their landscapes to see their numbers increase to 1,000 birds and 250 pairs, ensuring they are safe from extinction.

**STRATEGY:** Resolve threats by protecting wintering habitat on the Texas gulf coast and by reducing threats along the migratory path.

**IMPACT:** The naturally occurring flock of Whooping Cranes now numbers more than 500, up from a low of just 21 birds.

## In Africa...

**OUR GOAL:** Restore and maintain large African floodplains for Wattled Cranes and their delicate ecosystem.

**STRATEGY:** We are removing thousands of acres of invasive shrubs and improving water conditions for cranes, the endangered Kafue lechwe, and many other threatened species.

**IMPACT:** More than 232,000 acres of critical wetlands and catchments have been protected in Africa through Conservation and Stewardship Agreements.

## In Southeast Asia...

**OUR GOAL:** Stabilize and increase the Sarus Crane population by championing community-supported conservation practices.

**STRATEGY:** Advance the sustainable harvest of wetland grasses and teach weavers to market their wares to more lucrative markets to protect wetlands so cranes and people prosper.

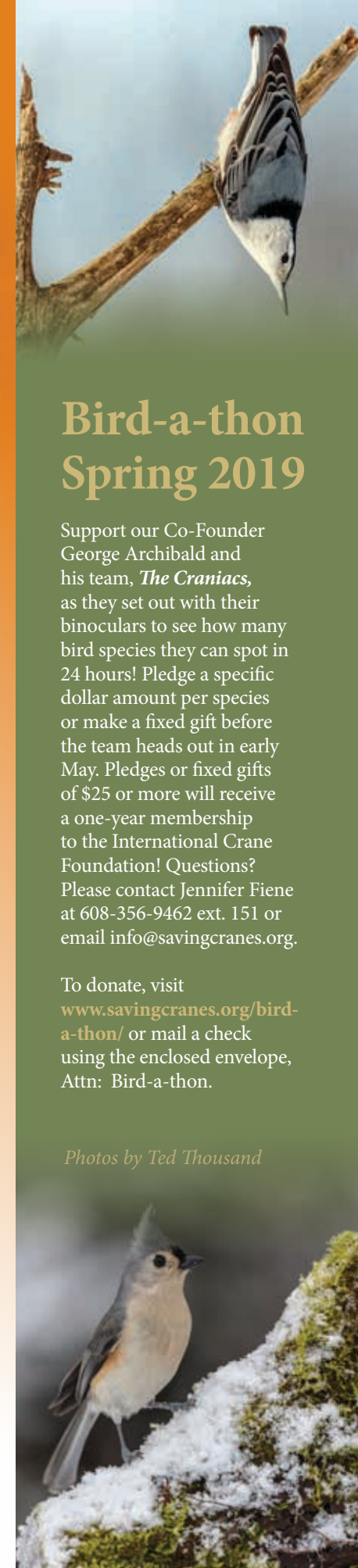
**IMPACT:** Sarus Cranes are improving livelihoods. Over 400 households are supported through sustainable handicraft production at Phu My wetland in Vietnam.

## Please continue the journey with us!

Send a gift today to the International Crane Foundation by using the enclosed envelope or donating on our website at [www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org).



To see if your employer will match your gift, go to [www.savingcranes.org/support-icf/matching-gifts/](http://www.savingcranes.org/support-icf/matching-gifts/)



# Bird-a-thon Spring 2019

Support our Co-Founder George Archibald and his team, *The Craniacs*, as they set out with their binoculars to see how many bird species they can spot in 24 hours! Pledge a specific dollar amount per species or make a fixed gift before the team heads out in early May. Pledges or fixed gifts of \$25 or more will receive a one-year membership to the International Crane Foundation! Questions? Please contact Jennifer Fiene at 608-356-9462 ext. 151 or email [info@savingcranes.org](mailto:info@savingcranes.org).

To donate, visit [www.savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon/](http://www.savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon/) or mail a check using the enclosed envelope, Attn: Bird-a-thon.

*Photos by Ted Thousand*



## International Crane Foundation

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