



January/February 2021

75th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count Results – The Prologue....

2020 being 2020, it will come as no surprise to you that the 2020 CBC report will be slightly different from that of past years – as a matter of fact, you will have to wait for the March-April newsletter for the full report. For now, you'll have to settle for a quick teaser, if you will, to set the stage for the report proper.

It will come as no surprise to you that this year's CBC was unlike any other. Clearly, the Covid pandemic was the responsible party here and caused a significant amount of uncertainty in the lead-up to the event. For some time, it was not even clear whether there would be CBCs at all in the 2020-2021 cycle, with the National Audubon Society (NAS) not ruling out an all-around cancelation until as far down the line as mid-November. Even when it did give the green light, the guidelines NAS ultimately released were quite strict (as set out in last year's CBC announcement article), so as to ensure that CBCs did not become the source of any new infections.

With that in mind, I contacted the area leaders with my plan of attack, and, given that the Ann Arbor CBC has a well-prepared corps of volunteers, we prepared for what we all thought would be a manageable, and (hopefully) not too terribly out of the ordinary count. As registrations started coming in, however, it was soon obvious that the 2020 CBC would be anything but. The Covid-quarantine turned many people into new birders and quite a few of these were volunteering enthusiastically for our CBC! Although at any other time this would be great news, NAS-imposed party-size restrictions forced us into devising ways to accommodate all of these volunteers. One by one, each of the eight count areas filled up, and with a couple of days left until count day, online registration for field observers had to be shut down. Luckily, several of these unlucky folks were able to pitch in as feeder watchers.

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President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon and friends,

As we reflect on the New Year, and the transition of power to a competent and environment friendly administration, my thoughts turn to what we can do to help birds while staying safe during the COVID pandemic. So, I have some thoughts about New Year's resolutions for 2021:

10. Get outside for a walk every day to see some birds.
9. Mask up if birding in crowds. Avoid popular parks on weekends. Explore a new outdoor space.
8. Write my senator and congressperson to support environmentally sound policies.
7. Congratulate President Biden for rejoining the Paris Climate Accords and the World Health Organization.
6. Write President Biden, requesting he rescind the Trump Administration's gutting of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
5. Try to do the most good for birds that I can, every day.
4. Thank our wonderful and supportive WAS Members and Board, early and often.
3. Promote local birding, including the 5 Mile Radius Birding movement.
2. Support Young Birders and explore ways to get more kids involved in birding.
1. Continue Washtenaw Audubon Society's work to help our organization become more inclusive, equitable and diverse in all ways. Welcome birders of color, birders with different abilities, birders of all ages, genders and religions, LGBTQIA birders and anyone interested in enjoying birds and nature with us, without regard to any status.

Please enjoy this issue of the Washtenaw Audubon Society Newsletter, courtesy of our fabulous Newsletter Editor, Jacco Gelderloos. While our field trips remain on hold due to COVID, our programs continue virtually, thanks to the creativity of our Vice-President and Program Chair, Mike Sefton, and our Zoom expert and Membership Chair, Jessica Adamczyk. Thanks to all WAS members for your support during this difficult time, and to the new members who have joined us during the pandemic, despite not having met us in person. Your enthusiasm means the world to us and to the birds.

I'll see you at the next Zoom program! May we meet again, at the next good bird, as soon as it is safe to do so.

As always, I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger, President

Washtenaw Audubon Society



Red Crossbill (Juliet Berger)

75th Ann Arbor CBC – Results (sort of)

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When all was said and done, we ended up with an unprecedented 137 total volunteers! 107 field observers broke out into over 60 parties, and 36 feeder watchers put in a record amount of time (some folks did double duty). Clearly, this staggering number of people out and about looking for (and finding!) birds must have had a major impact on our results. To find out more about that, please keep an eye out for the March-April newsletter!

Until then,
Jacco Gelderloos
Ann Arbor CBC Compiler



Snow Bunting (Victor Chen)

Connect to birds, to nature, and with each other: The Great Backyard Bird Count

Each year people from around the world come together to watch, learn about, count, and celebrate birds. Join us, February 12-15, 2021 for the Great Backyard Bird Count. While observing social distancing guidelines, let's count the birds in our backyards, neighborhood parks and patches, and enter our results in eBird, thus contributing to the science and understanding of birds. Then, share the highlights with us in the Discussion section on the Great Backyard Bird Count Event on Washtenaw Audubon's Facebook page, so we can cheer for each other's cool sightings, and strengthen our sense of community.

https://www.facebook.com/events/1052873908546870/?active_tab=discussion

Good birding!!

Juliet Berger

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The Washtenaw Audubon Society is an active chapter of Michigan Audubon formed in the early 1950s. Monthly programs feature guest speakers on a wide variety of natural history and birding topics. We conduct field trips to places in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and beyond.

November-December 2020: Late Fall & Early Winter Highlights

The Highlight

In what was already an extraordinary birding year, 2020 dished out what can only be described as yet another astonishing surprise at the tail end. Unfortunately, this rarity was seen by a single observer, who had the presence of mind to grab his camera when he noticed a bird he didn't immediately recognize in a pear tree in his front yard. It kindly hung around long enough for him to document Washtenaw County's first ever **Sage Thrasher**! Shortly afterwards, this totally unexpected bird flew off and wasn't relocated, despite many birders out searching for it the next day. Only about 10 total records exist for the State as a whole, although, interestingly, this was one of three Sage Thrashers found in Michigan in 2020.



Sage Thrasher *Oreoscoptes montanus*, Hickory Woods subdivision, November 13 2020 (Bill VanderMolen)

Waterfowl

Geese put in quite the show during this period, with five species present. A blue morph **Snow Goose** was found in Millpointe Park on 12/9; roughly a week later, white morph **Snow Geese** were photographed in the Huron River near Parker Mill Park (12/16 - 12/19) and among Canada Geese along Vreeland Rd (12/19), and may have involved the same bird. About a month earlier, a **Ross's Goose** was first seen at Trinkle Marsh on 11/17, and then moved on to nearby Pierce Lake, where it stayed through 12/12. Similarly, a lone **Greater White-fronted Goose** associating with a large flock of Canada Geese in a Dexter business park from 11/12 – 11/21 had likely moved on to Daly Rd pond on 11/23. The first of a flurry of **Cackling Geese** were two along Vreeland Rd (11/1). Three weeks later, one was found at Thurston Pond (11/21), followed by up to five at the Ann Arbor Landfill (11/27 – 12/19). Some of these birds may have been involved when three of these diminutive geese were found in the Travis Pointe subdivision on 12/3, where they continued through 12/7. Lastly, up to six **Cackling Geese** were picked out from among hundreds of Canada Geese along Vreeland Rd (12/18 – 12/30) – it seems likely that double-digit numbers of this cute goose were roaming the County during the middle of December.



Ross's Goose *Anser rossii*, Pierce Lake, December 9 2020, (Michael Bowen)



Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii*, Thurston Pond, November 21 2020 (Victor Chen)

After a few very unseasonal records in early October, **Tundra Swans** with better timing started moving through our area in mid-November (9 or so reports). By and large, this movement involved fly-over groups, with maxima of 45 over Watkins Lake (11/13) and 40 over private property in Lodi Twp (12/22). Among the usual suspects among dabbling ducks, four scattered reports of 1 or 2 **Northern Pintails** (between 11/18 – 12/19) stood out. **Canvasbacks** were oddly uncommon, with small groups of 3-8 birds scattered on three major lakes in early November, and a half dozen of this handsome *aythya* duck located on Portage Lake (12/31). On the same day, this latter group was joined by a female **Greater Scaup**, along with more expected Redheads and Lesser Scaups.

Locally, scoters are generally considered the holy grail among waterfowl, so the presence of all three species was quite the treat. Starting 11/3, Portage Lake hosted a quartet of female **Black Scoters**, which were often quite nicely visible from the Portage Yacht Club. By contrast, the 3-4 **White-winged Scoters** on the same lake were generally much farther out and views were often compromised by heat distortion. These rare ducks were last seen on 11/9 and 11/8, respectively. Much more cooperative was a female **Surf Scoter** discovered in Gallup Park on 12/16; during its stay (through 12/31), it often approached the shore quite closely, allowing excellent views (so long as it wasn't sleeping).



Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* & White-winged Scoters *Melanitta deglandi*, Portage Lake, November 7 2020 (Russell Ryan)



Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*, Gallup Park, December 22 2020 (Juliet Berger)

Rating just about as high as the previous three species, **Long-tailed Ducks** were present on Independence Lake from 11/10 – 11/11, and from 11/27 – 12/2. Photos of these birds seem to indicate that two different birds may have been involved. **Red-breasted Mergansers** appeared on a handful of bodies of water, with a high tally of 5 birds on Ford Lake on 12/12.

Grebes through Gulls

Although they are not rare migrants, per se, the presence of up to 18 **Horned Grebes** on Portage Lake (11/3) was definitely noteworthy. Much more uncommon, a pair of **Red-necked Grebes** were found on Whitmore Lake on 11/28 and hung around until 12/2. Always the last *calidris* sandpiper to move through, up to 8 **Dunlin** hung around the shores of Four Mile Lake through 11/21. Indicating that the species may hang around longer than generally thought, an **American Woodcock** was flushed at LeFurge Woods on 11/7. Equally tardy were 2 **Wilson's Snipes** at Barton Pond on 11/11. A somewhat surprising total of 5 **Greater Yellowlegs** were reported from 4 different locations, up until 11/28).

In a normal year, under normal circumstances, *the* place to go for unusual gulls is the large landfill in Salem Twp, most easily done by joining the WAS gull field trip. With that outing cancelled due to Covid, local larophiles were forced to find their gulls some other way. And so they did! On 12/9, 3 **Iceland Gulls** were picked out from among roosting gulls in the compost section of the Salem landfill. From 12/4 – 12/23, the other go-to place for gulls, the east end of Ford Lake, hosted 2 first-year **Iceland Gulls**, one each of the *thayeri* and *kumlieni* subspecies. The same two locations also hosted multiple **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, with up to 3 at the landfill (11/17 – 12/18) and 4 near the Bridge Rd Dam (12/2 – 12/17). A few more of these Old World gulls were turned up in couple of other spots as well: 2 at Joy & Vorhies (11/26), and 1 at North Bay Park (12/5 – 12/27). An intriguing gull was photographed at the intersection of Geddes & Harris on 11/26 - based on the mix of field marks, this may well have been a hybrid with Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gull parentage. The only **Glaucous Gulls** of the season were 2 adults among the large congregation of gulls near Bridge Rd, from 12/8 – 12/9. Last but not least, the two gulling hotspots also featured multiple **Great Black-backed Gulls**: up to 2 birds, including an immature, were present at the Salem landfill from 12/9 – 12/18, and as many as 7 birds were observed near the Bridge Rd Dam between 12/4 and 12/29.



Iceland Gull *Larus glaucooides*, Bridge Rd Dam, December 6 2020 (Amy Lyyski)



Possible Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull hybrid, *Larus fuscus x argentatus*, Geddes & Harris Rd, November 26 2020 (Dominick Fenech)

New World Vultures through Falcons

After already providing spring and early fall records, yet another **Black Vulture** showed up in Washtenaw County, starting with a 11/8 encounter at the Fox Science Preserve, followed by a reliable presence nearby, in the area around Pratt Rd (12/17 – 12/29). As many as 4 **Golden Eagles** soared over the Torrey Rd hawk watch in Augusta Twp during the brief window of favorable winds from 11/12 – 11/14. In a classic example of the Patagonia Rest Stop Effect, an adult was photographed over Delhi Overlook on 12/20, and an immature passed over private property in Lodi Twp two days later – all in all, a very good showing of this rare raptor! **Red-shouldered Hawks** were reported from some 15 locations throughout the period, with a maximum of 3 birds on 11/23 at Crooked Lake. Putting in a similarly good showing, Rough-legged Hawks (including at least one dark morph) turned up in close to a dozen locations, with 2 of these handsome *buteos* present along Vreeland Rd on 11/28. A couple of **Short-eared Owls** hung around the fields at the Vreeland & Gotfredson intersection until 12/2; another individual was noted in Webster Twp on 11/21.

As was the case in the previous period, **Barred Owls** were found in about a half dozen places, including one each in Ann Arbor and Saline, for some uncommon records away from the species stronghold in the western townships. A whopping three different **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were reported: in Lodi Twp (11/6 – 12/22), at LeFurge Woods

(12/9 – 12/26), and at Independence Lake (12/24). The only **Red-headed Woodpecker** of the period was seen near Joy & Dixboro on 11/20. **Merlins** could be encountered just about anywhere, it appeared, with individuals noted from 20+ sites throughout the period. Indicating that migrants were moving through, **Peregrine Falcons** were seen in a handful of spots away from the species's reliable down-town Ann Arbor haunts.



Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*, Dexter-Ann Arbor & Pratt Rd, December 20 2020 (Lyle Hamilton)



Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Delhi Overlook, December 20 2020 (Deaver Armstrong)

Passerines: Flycatchers through Pipits

Several hardy **Eastern Phoebes** hung around well into November, with one seen as late as 11/20 at Saginaw Forest. Starting in the last week of November, **Northern Shrikes** started appearing in the County. Most of these birds were around for only a day or two, but at least three of these feisty songbirds hung around for a week or more: along Vreeland Rd (12/1 – 12/27), at the DeVine Preserve (12/15 – 12/21), and at Delhi Overlook (12/19 – 12/30). November typically makes up the tail end of **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** migration, so individuals found at Walsh Lake and Washtenaw Community College (both on 12/19) were certainly of note. Continuing their irruption, **Red-breasted Nuthatch** reports continued to flow in from dozens of locations throughout Washtenaw County for all of November and December. Although the majority of these involved one or two birds, some mind-boggling flocks occurred where conditions allowed: a staggering 60(!) were conservatively estimated in the pines at the Cedar Lake Campground on 11/5, with an equally impressive 52 at Stinchfield Woods on 11/16.



Northern Shrike *Lanius borealis*, Vreeland & Leforge Rd, December 1 2020 (Mike Sefton)



Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*, Barton Nature Area, November 24 2020 (Benjamin Hack)

Winter Wrens had a banner year with reports coming in from 25 locations across the County, with several among them involving 2 birds. Although they occasionally show up on the Ann Arbor CBC, a **Brown Thrasher** at the Barton Nature Area (11/24) and near Barton Pond (12/29) is definitely unusual, and may well have been the same bird

given the proximity of the two locations. As is to be expected, two of the three reports for **Northern Mockingbirds** came from the southwestern corner of the County, with 4 birds at the Watkins Lake Preserve on 11/28. More unusually, one of these mimids was seen near the Black Vulture stake-out on 12/21. The only **American Pipits** were seen along Meyers Rd (6 birds on 11/6) and over the Argo Nature Area on 11/7.

Passerines: Finches

Many of the winter finches that made early fall so exciting hung around, and the irruption even broadened its scope! Groups of **Evening Grosbeaks** were noted widely during November, including 14 at an Ann Arbor feeder on 11/1. Most of these observations involved fly-overs, with a flock of 15 birds of the Cedar Lake Campground 11/6, where they were seen off and on through 11/23. By the time December rolled around, these gorgeous finches were pretty much gone from our area, with only two reports of one bird each. Mirroring the previous species's trend, **Purple Finches** continued their presence locally into November, but numbers dropped off rather steeply: a flock of 10 flying over the Torrey Rd hawk watch on 11/7 was by far the largest group, comparing quite poorly to the bonanza we had in October. With the arrival of December, they were largely gone with a maximum of two birds at only five locations. Always the more common winter finch, **Pine Siskins** were also most widespread. During November, siskins were found at some 40 locations, with as many as 80 birds present at a feeder just west of the Foster Rd bridge on 11/30; in December, they were still present at some 25 locations, with a maximum of 69 at Baker & Dan Hoey in Dexter on 12/25.



Evening Grosbeak *Coccothraustes vespertinus*, Loyola Dr, November 1 2020 (Juliet Berger)



Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea*, Judd Rd, December 18 2020 (Deaver Armstrong)

Hot on the heels of the three species above, **Common Redpolls** appeared in our area as soon as November rolled around and their numbers built up to impressive levels: among the 25+ November reports, a flock of 82 was counted at a feeder at Gregory & Vaughn Rds on 11/24. Even though the geographic scope of this irruptive movement contracted in December, flocks of 50-60 birds were reported from three different sites, so scattered smaller groups may have combined into larger, more concentrated aggregations.



Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*, Cedar Lake Campground, November 5 2020 (Brendan Klick)



White-winged Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera*, Cedar Lake Campground, November 23 2020 (Benjamin Hack)

A search of the pines at the Cedar Lake Campground turned up a roaming flock of **Red Crossbills** on 11/3, with numbers peaking at 30 on 11/6 & 11/7. These birds were still around as of 12/31. A lone individual was recorded over Main & Pauline 11/27, and a group of 10 was observed over Stinchfield Woods on 11/28 – crossbill expert Matt Young identified all of these birds as Type 10 or Sitka Spruce Red Crossbills. Close scrutiny of photos taken of the crossbill flock at Cedar Lake revealed the presence of a **White-winged Crossbill** there – these birds were hard to pin down, but on 11/5 at least 3 of them were observed. Small numbers of these handsome little finches were seen or heard in another six locations, topping out at 4 birds in Stinchfield Woods.

Passerines: Longspurs through Cardinals

As is to be expected, **Lapland Longspurs** were present in the fields along Vreeland Rd in good numbers starting 11/14, with as many as 60 reported on 12/13. A small group was over a nearby field at Cherry Hill & Frains Lake on 11/28. More unusual was a bird over County Farm Park on 11/8. Starting on 11/14, **Snow Bunting** numbers along Vreeland Rd started building, culminating in an impressive total of 300 on 11/29. A few smaller groups were seen at nearby sites but were apparently and oddly absent from appropriate habitat elsewhere.

Generally associated with spring and summer, **Chipping Sparrows** lingered in our area until 11/22, and **Field Sparrows** stuck around until 11/24. November saw a major push of **Fox Sparrows** through our area, with up to 3 birds reported from 20+ sites. This movement tends to peter out rapidly with the arrival of December, but at least 4 individuals were around into the latter parts of that month: 1 frequenting a feeder near Dexter throughout the month, 2 at the Fox Science Preserve on 12/23, and 1 at Vreeland & Hickman on 12/29. Much the same pattern was evident with **White-crowned Sparrows** – widespread movement in November (up to 5 birds at some 20 locations), followed by only scattered hangers-on in December. Individuals attended two feeders around Ann Arbor on 12/19, 2 birds were present northeast of Ann Arbor on 12/29, and another was at a Dexter feeder on the same day. Quite surprisingly, 2 **Savannah Sparrows** stuck it out locally until mid-November – 1 bird along Meyers Rd on 11/6 and another in the Hickory Woods sub on 11/14, turned up during the fruitless search for the Sage Thrasher. Straggling **Eastern Towhees** were seen on 11/12, one off Dexter-Ann Arbor Rd, the other off Huron River Dr.



Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*, Vreeland & Gofredson Rd, December 1 2020 (Bill Nolting)



Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*, Vreeland & Hickman Rd, December 29 2020 (Victor Chen)

By the end of October, meadowlarks are essentially gone from our area, so **Eastern Meadowlarks** at Rolling Hills County Park (11/3) and at the Conservancy Farm (11/29) were quite unusual. The latter site also hosted a meadowlark not identified to species on 11/5, which may have involved the bird photographed there on the 29th. Good numbers of **Rusty Blackbirds** moved during November, with as many as 30 birds in one of these groups. Much rarer, 2 **Brewer's Blackbirds** were seen along Meyers Rd on 11/5, with at least one of them persisting until the next day. Unfortunately, this great find wasn't shared with the wider birding community until days later, when the birds were gone.

November-December is not the time of year associated with warblers, but a surprising variety of parulids was found during this period. Always among the later migrants, an **Orange-crowned Warbler** at Greenview/Pioneer on 11/2 was right at the tail end of their migration window. Although quite late, the **Common Yellowthroat** at Waterworks Park on 11/3 was not too far out of the ordinary, but a bird recorded at the DeVine Preserve on 12/15 most certainly was. Almost two months late, a **Northern Parula** photographed at Delhi Overlook on 11/23 provided one of very few winter records for Michigan – interestingly, another parula was photographed in Lenawee County some 10 days earlier!

The **Palm Warbler** seen at Independence Lake on 11/4 was not quite as late but was still only Washtenaw County's 3rd November record in eBird. By and large the hardiest of warbler species, southbound **Yellow-rumped Warblers** moved through in good numbers during November, with a couple of reports into the first week of December. And even though quite a few CBC records exist, the 'butter-butt' seen on Ann Arbor's north side on Christmas Eve was still quite extraordinary.



Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*, Meyers Rd, November 6 2020 (Maggie Jewett)



Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*, Waterworks Park, December 4 2020 (Bill Nolting)

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The birds Washtenaw Audubon pledges to protect differ in color, size, behavior, geographical preference, and countless other ways. As we honor and celebrate the equally remarkable diversity of the human species, Washtenaw Audubon considers the work of inclusion, diversity, and equity a top priority moving forward. We hope that, in doing so, we can bring creativity and energy to our work in Washtenaw County and beyond for birds and people alike.



[Read our full statement at washtenawaudubon.org](http://washtenawaudubon.org)

To become a member of Washtenaw Audubon Society, please complete the form below (or a copy) and mail it with a check or money order payable to **Washtenaw Audubon Society—WAS Membership, P.O. Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	Membership Dues	
Additional Donation \$ _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
Name: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: _____	Email: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$50

We encourage you to join at a lower rate if the suggested rates would otherwise preclude your membership, or at a higher rate if you possess the means. **Note:** WAS will only use your email address to communicate with you about WAS programs, field trips, or matters of interest to you, such as membership renewal and emailed WAS newsletters (in color!). We will not give your email address to anyone else.

WAS Monthly Programs

Washtenaw Audubon's in-person programs at the Botanical Gardens are on hold until the University allows gatherings to take place. To view our online Zoom programs, you will need access to an internet-capable computer, phone, or similar device. An announcement of the web address to view the program will be on our web site, Facebook page, and on the Birders email list a few days before the program. Please note that due to COVID, all in person field trips are cancelled as well.

We may also add more online programs for November and the future, which will be announced on the same internet platforms.

February 17, 7:30 p.m. Demystifying Great Lakes Waterbirds in Flight- with Alison Vilag

Join Alison Vilag for this outstanding program on Great Lakes Waterfowl ID.

The Zoom link is for this program is listed below:

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/97648849414>

Or dial-in: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 976 4884 9414

No password

March 17, 7:30 p.m. Delisting of Gray Wolves: a Conservationist's Call to Action – with Cathy Theisen

Gray Wolves were delisted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services in the entire lower 48 states, effective January 4, 2021. Given that the Gray Wolf has viable populations in only a handful of states, this seems to be an effort to prevent, not encourage, further recovery of a still endangered species. Join Washtenaw Audubon's Conservation Chair, Cathy Theisen, DVM, to examine why this unusual and scientifically unsound interpretation of the Endangered Species Act should be of concern to conservationists, birders and wildlife watchers everywhere.

The Zoom link is for this program is listed below:

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/99877609593>

Or dial-in: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 998 7760 9593

No password

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