

# SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER



VOLUME 51, NUMBER 3 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 2020

## NEXT MEETING

DATE: Tuesday, November 10, 2020  
TIME: 7:30 P.M.  
PLACE: ONLINE  
SPEAKER: Cristen Sagevick  
TOPIC: Raptors of Long Island



Join Zoom Meeting:  
Meeting URL: <https://zoom.us/j/92498368981>  
Meeting ID: 924 9836 8981  
Passcode: 715959  
Phone: +1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

You can click on links to the Zoom meeting from the SSAS website under Next Monthly Meeting or from the SSAS Facebook page under Events.

Get an in-depth explanation of species specific hunting methods, diurnal versus nocturnal adaptations, and unique survival tactics! Learn how to help conserve these species and get to meet our raptor Ambassadors during this exciting and highly informative program.

Cristen Sagevick is the Education Coordinator for Volunteers for Wildlife. She has a bachelor's degree in animal biology and conservation from Oxford Brookes University. She has previous experience working with cats and dogs as well as researching wildlife at Ranthambore National Park in India and volunteering in South Africa. Cristen joined Volunteers for Wildlife in 2018 as a rehabilitation intern and then transitioned to her current role in 2020.



SSAS Post Office Statement — South Shore Skimmer is published monthly from September through December and February through May by South Shore Audubon Society, P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.



## CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

Due to the continuing risk of COVID-19, the Freeport Memorial Library has cancelled all in-person programs indefinitely. Our general membership meetings will be held on Zoom for the foreseeable future. Our bird walks have also been cancelled due to the difficulty of maintaining social distance with potentially large groups on narrow trails.

For those who continue birding, with its benefits for physical and mental health, we recommend following National Audubon Society guidelines: wear a mask, keep a minimum distance of 6 feet from other people, bring hand sanitizer, and do not share binoculars or spotting scopes.

Please watch our website or follow us on Facebook or call 516-220-7121 for the status of bird walks, meetings, and events.



## VIEW OUR VIDEOS!

Visit our website at <http://www.ssaudubon.org/video.asp> to watch short videos about our activities and advocacy including Waterfowl Survey & Climate Watch, Native Plant Garden at Tackapausha Museum, Jerry Bishop Environmental Scholarship, Climate Change & Offshore Wind Farms, and Birds & Building Collisions. We thank Alene Scoble for creating the videos and our members for participating.



SSAS Mission Statement — The mission of South Shore Audubon Society is to promote environmental education; conduct research pertaining to local bird populations, wildlife, and habitat; and to preserve and restore our environment, through responsible activism, for the benefit of both people and wildlife.



## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Wendy Murbach

One of the wonderful perks that you get from an Audubon membership is the chance to be a part of your local Audubon chapter, the South Shore Audubon Society.

You are automatically a valued member of this active and friendly chapter, so please join us at the next online meeting from 7:30–9:00 P.M., normally on the second Tuesday of the month, to hear what you can do to help preserve your local environment’s health and viability, to hear about local issues that you can help to solve, and to see an interesting program.

You are warmly invited to be an active participant in this vibrant all-volunteer organization comprised of persons who, like you, care about the earth we live on, about our local environment, and about the creatures that live alongside us.

Our new members since the October Skimmer are:

Lynbrook ..... Catherine Overton  
Merrick ..... Erika Lichy



## BIRDING IN MY BACKYARD IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Alvin Friedman, CFSP, CCC

Founder & First President, South Shore Audubon Society

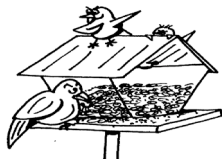
It is 8:30 in the morning and I have at least 50 birds at my 5 feeder trays. Most of the birds are Lesser Goldfinches, House Finches, and Mourning Doves. On the ground are Song Sparrows and House Wrens.



Daily visitors are a family of Black-headed Grosbeaks: one male, one female, and one immature.

Regular visitors are Scrub Jay, California Towhee, Coopers Hawk, and Eurasian Collared Dove.

In addition to my tray feeders, I have two hummingbird feeders that get many Anna’s Hummingbirds. On an elevated stand I have two large pottery bowls filled with water, and in the water I have solar bubblers. The birds love to drink the water and take frequent baths. Watching my feathered friends makes my day!



VOLUNTEERS FOR WILDLIFE (516) 674-0982



## SUBURBAN SERENADE

Brien Weiner

Although my backyard is not as productive as Alvin’s, during the summer I found that I had some noisy new neighbors -- and I welcomed their chatter and charm and companionship as I worked from home. A flock of Monk Parakeets was frequenting a large evergreen tree behind my house; previously, only a few would visit my feeder occasionally during the winter.

It wasn’t too many years ago that Monk Parakeets were a target bird for which I drove out east on Long Island. Despite their invasive status, their few known nests were a draw for birders. When the well-known nest atop a transformer near Shinnecock Bay was burned in a fire, it was a cause for mourning. It was always worth a detour to see Monk Parakeets atop poles in places like Amityville and Massapequa, and they are still a treat on SSAS bird walks at Norman Levy Preserve. But they have now spread to many places on Long Island and nest atop poles at parks, ball fields, churches, grocery stores, and elsewhere. They are now seemingly everywhere in my hometown of Valley Stream.

While parakeets are associated with more tropical climates, Monk Parakeets are native to South America in dry savannas with scattered trees at elevations up to 6,000 feet. Their large multifamily stick nests may help them survive the cold weather as far north as New York and Chicago. Urban lore says they escaped in the 1960s from cargo at Kennedy International Airport... or from a pet store in Valley Stream... or in Rockville Centre...

Once Monk Parakeets choose a home, they stick to it. And their proliferation in Brooklyn and Queens atop transformers was the cause of multiple fires and outages; the nests trap heat and cause electrical devices to short-circuit.

Monk Parakeets resist removal and will build their nests back in 7 days. Con Ed tried nets, spikes, deterrent sprays, sound machines, and Hootie, a \$20,000 robotic owl that swiveled its head and hooted. Hootie worked until it ran out of batteries and the Monk Parakeets became wise to it; then even with fresh batteries, they ignored it.

Monk Parakeets are the only parakeets to nest communally. When kept in captivity, they learn to mimic human speech, although they don’t do a bad imitation of political debate outside my window. They leave their nest to forage for seeds, buds, fruit, berries, nuts, and blossoms during the day, and return to their nest in the evening. They spend a lot of time preening each other. They form monogamous pairs, and courtship occurs by preening each other and grasping each others beaks and shaking their heads. They can live 6 or more years in the wild and show fidelity to both mate and nest,

The theory is that they got their name from the color going up the back of their head like a monk’s hood; however, it seems to me that these gregarious and charismatic birds lead anything but the monastic life!



## BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

The Birds at My Table by Darryl Jones

*R. U. Abyrdar II with Sy Schiff*

This is a comprehensive look at the literature on assisting birds by feeding them. Bird feeding is a universal worldwide endeavor. Thus the author, who now resides and teaches in Australia, has covered the subject worldwide. Wanting to bring a bit more to the narrative than just digesting the literature on the subject, he chose to actually visit or otherwise communicate with the authors of much of the published articles on the topic. The thought was to get a bit of the underlying drama that might have occurred while the research and writing was going on. This does not appear in the final articles. The preface is a quick look at his travel over a good bit of the world to see and talk to people. Travels took him to Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States.

The first chapter reports the prevalence of feeding in various locations worldwide and how the data was obtained. A considerable discussion follows on the problems with how the methods used can be flawed and what problems arise when doing statistical research by interrogating people by mail and in person. This analysis is eye-opening for many things and I am going to look at political polls a bit differently in the future.

The author goes on to try to find the beginnings to a fairly universal bird feeding everywhere and then a gradual switch to year-round feeding. The data is sparse and how we got there is iffy, but here we are. The details and search and the people he talks to in the above countries are intriguing. As in many quests, the journey is more interesting than the finish.

Is feeding good or bad? Data is scarce but doing so is probably not a problem. Benefits are described (that is, if there are benefits) based on the research that has been done. By looking at a problem, new insights and new problems surface. Depending on your point of view, I found the search described more interesting. The equivalent research on similar small birds in England and North America was enlightening. The results did not come out as the preexisting thoughts expected. Everything turns out new and enlightening.

The studies in the health and well-being of feeder birds in controlled studies of feeding birds various food mixtures are covered. Also, problems in the health of birds at feeders are covered. The full experience of the House Finch problem, its development, and its ongoing situation are covered in detail. If you want to know about it, it's all here as well as other pathogens cropping up at feeders. And the deadly chemicals that have shown up in the feed itself.

The book tells us a lot about feeding and even more about how little we think we know. A lot to wade through. I personally find looking at the research the most interesting. Others may think otherwise. A complex situation and a complex set of studies still going on.

## SCOBE SQUAWKS

Shweetie

*Frank Scoblete*

My wife, the Beautiful AP and I were outside checking on the damage that some fallen branches had caused on our property due to the storm Isaias. I am on one side of our house; she is on the other side of our house.

There was some damage; a fence was hit with a large branch right near the bedroom side of the house. "There's a totally broken fence over here," I shouted. "Destroyed the fence and just missed the bedroom by about a foot too."

"There's Shweetie asking for food over here," she shouted.

"Shweetie was on the deck's railing yesterday asking me for food," I shouted back. I did give him some seeds yesterday.

We named him Shweetie because almost all Cardinals are shweeties. But this one was our special one.

"Hi Shweetie," laughed AP.

I went around to that side of the house and sure enough there was Shweetie, the Cardinal, standing on our gutter looking down at us and squawking.



But we needed to check the house so we walked around it. Shweetie followed us around the whole house. He was on the gutters and we were on the ground. Shweetie made sure we were always within sight and sound.

"We have to feed him," said AP. So when we got to the deck at the back of the house, AP went inside and brought out some seed. Shweetie was on the railing, waiting patiently, about five feet from us. I was talking to him, asking him about his day and how his family was getting along.

When he saw AP approaching with the bowl of food, he hopped onto the branch of a bush near the railing. Although Shweetie knew us from weeks of contact, since we'd talk to him gently as if he were a member of our household, he was a wild bird and still leery of us.

Shweetie was not like the pigeons in New York City or the gulls in almost all resort towns on the ocean; such birds have little fear of people. In fact, they will steal food from you if you do not pay them any attention.

The Beautiful AP and I sit on our deck almost daily and one day he joined us. Now after months of his daily visits, we have met his whole family consisting of Mrs. Shweetie, and his three juvenile daughters.

Shweetie feeds them in the bushes, trees, and right on the railing of our deck. He spends hours eating seeds and then regurgitating them into his children's beaks. The children quiver when he approaches them. Interestingly enough, Mrs. Shweetie has not done any feeding. She is also somewhat more skittish than Shweetie. I think the juveniles take us as part of the landscape.

"Why don't people have Cardinals as pets?" I asked. "These birds are absolutely beautiful. The male's red and



black coloration is amazing. Their songs are great too."

So we looked it up. Cardinals are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Cardinals cannot be sold as cage birds as they were over a century ago.

Sadly, in the wild Shweetie will probably live only three years. In captivity he could live almost two decades.

As I write this, I hear the call of Shweetie from the deck. He has a family to feed and the Beautiful AP and I are ready to help him out. It's the least we can do for our friend.

Visit Frank's web site at [www.franksoble.com](http://www.franksoble.com). His books are available from [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) (where you can support SSAS), Barnes and Noble, Kindle, eBooks, and at bookstores.

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**DON'T STEP IN THAT CAT POOP!**

*Franklin Rothenberg*

It wasn't too long ago -- I'm thinking in the 1970s -- when ordinances became prevalent requiring people to pick up their dog poop. Before that, it wasn't too uncommon to step upon it on occasion. The situation has greatly improved.

But what about cat poop? Probably on the top ten issues most politicians wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole is curtailing free-range felines. I've seen cats that easily outweigh small dogs that are licensed, leashed, and picked up after.



A responsible cat owner should do the same. People who let their cats out to do their business are hazarding feline leukemia, which spreads among cats, and other maladies that can spread from cats to people.

As a bird watching enthusiast, I am disheartened by the prevalence of birds as domestic cat prey.

**NYS MUST CURB TOXIC PFAS INCINERATION**

*Guy Jacob*

NYS is drowning in toxic PFAS chemicals. PFAS is short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. PFAS chemicals are found in nonstick pans (e.g. "Teflon"), food packaging, waterproof jackets, carpets (to repel water, grease and stains), and firefighting foam (AFFF). Even waterproof mascaras and eyeliners, sunscreen, shampoo, and shaving cream can contain PFAS.



According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), and other PFAS chemicals have been linked to cancer, developmental effects on fetuses and infants, liver effects, thyroid effects, and other adverse health impacts. These chemicals have been found in the drinking water supplies serving millions of New Yorkers, including those in Hoosick Falls, Petersburg, Newburgh, Cairo, numerous communities on Long Island, and elsewhere in the state.

AFFF is toxic firefighting foam, which is being phased out for safety reasons from fire departments across the eastern US as well as from military bases. The US Department of Defense (DoD) then needed to unload its unused AFFF and shipped it to NYS for incineration. The material came from 60 military facilities in 25 states.

In 2018 and 2019, Norlite burned 2 million pounds of AFFF in its Cohoes facility. Residents who have been exposed to the Cohoes incinerator for years noticed new smells. It was community residents' sense of danger, and the city government that represents them, that disallowed the DoD's "under the radar" shipments of AFFF. A moratorium, however, while a temporary stopgap, is not a substitute for enacting legislation that would drive the final nail in the coffin of toxic AFFF incineration throughout NYS.

Banning the incineration of AFFF in certain cities was unanimously approved by the NYS Legislature in June. The legislation would prohibit the incineration of aqueous film-forming foam (AFFF) and associated perfluorocarbon (PFAS) chemicals in cities with a NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) designated environmental justice area and with a population size between 16,000 and 17,000. As much has already been burned, the Legislature understood the urgent need to curb the peril from previous exposure. The collective unequivocal will of our Legislature should influence Governor Cuomo's decision to sign the bill, but he has yet to ask the Legislature to send him the bill.

In June, I wrote Governor Cuomo on behalf of SSAS and beseeched him to sign Senate 7880B / Assembly 9952B into law, which would ban Aqueous Film-Forming Foam (AFFF) incineration in all environmental justice communities within NYS.

While we appreciated the response to our correspondence, we were disheartened to read NYSDEC Regional

Director Keith Gortz's July 21, 2020 letter. Moreover, since the time of his writing, there has not been any new information we know of about recent studies he generally references in his letter regarding incineration of AFFF.

Additionally, testing done by Bennington College found soil and water around the facility was laced with PFAS compounds commonly found in AFFF. The NYSDEC has disputed those findings, but it is our understanding that the NYSDEC has not yet released any findings of its own. The NYSDEC has been conducting comprehensive soil and water sampling in the area surrounding the Cohoes incinerator since July. In a recent follow-up letter, I asked Governor Cuomo when we can expect release of their findings and whether the studies will be independently reviewed and compared with the Bennington study. We await his response.

Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) has been linked to cancer in occupational mortality studies and animal toxicologic research. Cancer is associated with PFOA contaminated drinking water near chemical plants. The incidence of ulcerative colitis and other health problems were significantly increased in association with PFOA exposure. While these studies do not prove that PFOA toxins will persist after incineration, incineration certainly releases other known carcinogenic toxins into the air we breathe. It is reasonable to believe that as the Bennington study found, toxins do exist within the perimeter of the facility. Moreover, incinerators release more toxic pollution than coal-fired power plants per unit of energy.



As Senators Schumer and Gillibrand noted, in 2019 the EPA released a report titled, Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS): Incineration to Manage PFAS Waste Streams, that pointed out the myriad of unknowns in the EPA's understanding of the effectiveness of incineration for PFAS disposal. Additionally, a 2017 request by the DoD for a novel, safe disposal method for AFFF documented the DoD's admittance that burning PFAS would likely have adverse effects on the environment.

In court filings, the DoD argued that environmental testing was not required by law, and the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) requirements related to temperatures did not exist when contracts for burning were handed out. Apparently, since they believe that they are not required to test, they will just take their chances with incineration as long as incineration takes place far away from their military bases. What does the DoD's rationale for incinerating AFFF relative to its knowledge about its risks tell you about how much concern the Pentagon has for ordinary citizens?

The very fact that the armed forces phased out the use of AFFF because they contain PFAS that has contaminated ground water at military bases should be a huge red flag about allowing it to be shipped into NYS where it could leak or spill in route even before it arrives at a hazardous waste incinerator. If the military does not want it, why

should we risk taking it and burning it?

It is not the responsibility of NYS to manage the voluminous AFFF waste stream that the DoD has generated and now wants to unload on innocent civilians. New York's primary responsibility is the protection of its residents.

We remain gravely concerned about the Governor's apparent reluctance to sign Senate 7880B / Assembly 9952B. Scientific evidence points toward serious health concerns and environmental contamination associated with the incineration of AFFF. Sufficient information exists to err on the side of caution and sign this legislation into law.

What we do in Cohoes has statewide implications, and what we do in NYS has national implications. PFAS is at once a local and a national issue, but it is the responsibility of the DoD to determine how to responsibly dispose of it in a way that does not risk harm to civilians or soldiers.



## WOODMERE COASTAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEEDED NOW

*Brien Weiner*

As reported in our September 2020 newsletter, the Town of Hempstead and Villages of Woodsburgh and Lawrence established a Coastal Conservation District (CCD) to protect the 118-acre Woodmere Club from development into the 284-home Willow View Estates. And as predicted, the developers are now suing for violation of zoning laws and seeking either to block the CCD or to receive \$200 million in compensation.

Our zoning laws are fatally flawed in that they do not take into consideration the increased flooding that is the result of our climate crisis. While the developers, Robert Weiss and Efreem Geszberg, claim they met the requirements of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), as we have seen in so many cases, SEQRA fails to protect the environment because it allows the developer to serve as lead agency in the review -- the proverbial fox guarding the hen house.

Birds have returned to the Woodmere Club -- testimony to the power of nature to rejuvenate itself if given the chance. Concerned residents have reported an abundance and variety of birds using the area of the golf course since its closing and provided photo documentation of Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons, and Green Herons on the property, including young birds that are evidence of breeding. These species have shown declines from 1966 to 2014, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, largely due to development of wetlands.



If the Willow View Estates are built, it is unlikely that the displacement of birds will be temporary, as the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) claims.

Birds are an indicator of the health of our environment and the extensive tree removal for Willow View Estates

will have a significant negative impact on both birds and people. Trees capture carbon, cleanse the air, and provide shade as well as habitat. The native plantings proposed by the Willow View DEIS will not compensate for the loss of trees. Paving of green space traps heat that exacerbates the extreme temperatures of climate change. Further, the tree removal will change the character of the neighborhood and reduce the benefits that green space provides for our physical and mental health—benefits that have been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With coastal resilience becoming a national priority, it is mind-boggling that coastal development like Willow View Estates is allowed to proceed: this is disaster capitalism run amok. The bioswales and retention pools proposed by the DEIS are feeble measures against the intensifying storms and sea level rise of our climate crisis -- the equivalent of using a pea shooter to stop a tank. The added impervious surface will exacerbate flooding. The only effective solution is marsh restoration. US coastal wetlands provide \$23.2 billion of storm protection every year by slowing down wind and wave energy, and reducing erosion and flood damage. Living shoreline measures have lower replacement costs, can grow with sea level rise, improve water quality by filtering pollutants, and support fisheries as well as at-risk shorebirds.



Building on a floodplain is a risky and reckless gamble by a developer who will be bailed out by taxpayers to rebuild when properties are flooded. The time is now to stop further coastal development and start building natural defenses. Willow View Estates will also fuel our climate crisis by prolonging our dependency on natural gas. Adding 284 single-family homes will put stress on our sewer system and water supply, and threaten a sole source aquifer on which 3 million people depend. The plethora of vehicles introduced by construction and new residents will clog the streets and spew toxic fumes and greenhouse gas emissions. Emergency services of police, fire departments, and ambulances will be impaired.

The proposed Woodmere Club Conservation District is a well-reasoned and well-researched solution to the flooding that already plagues the area and will only become worse in coming decades. Developers and officials should stop the insanity and listen to the community: the chorus voicing opposition to coastal development and support for a Coastal Conservation District. It is a matter of local, regional, and indeed global survival.

The Woodmere Club Coastal Conservation District could become a destination for bird watchers, who would enrich the local economy. The growing popularity of bird watching accelerated with COVID-19 and appreciation of nature close to home. The Conservation District could ultimately become an outdoor laboratory for teaching our children to be responsible stewards of the environment.

## LEAVE THE LEAVES!



Take the advice of Todd Winston, Audubon's Plants for Birds manager.

You can help birds and other wildlife -- and save yourself some backache and blisters -- by skipping the leaf raking. "Those leaves are important because they rot and enrich the soil, and also provide places for bugs and birds to forage for food," Winston says. If a fully hands-off approach doesn't work for your yard, consider composting some leaves and letting the rest be. You could also rake them from the lawn to your garden beds, or mulch them with a mower to nourish your lawn.

Leaf litter isn't just free fertilizer -- it's also a pretty happening patch of habitat for a variety of critters such as salamanders, snails, worms, and toads. "If you're digging in the garden and come upon these squirmy little coppery-brown dudes, and you don't know what they are -- those are moth pupae," Winston says. A healthy layer of undisturbed soil and leaf litter means more moths, which in their caterpillar phase are a crucial food source for birds.



## JOIN US IN THE TACKAPAUSHA GARDEN

*Louise DeCesare*

If you haven't seen the Tackapausha garden yet, there is still time. Many of the summer flowers have gone to seed but there is still so much to see. From season to season, our garden is home to a wide range of local wildlife. The end of one cycle feeds the next. In this fragile ecosystem, every creature relies on one another for survival. At the time of this writing, blooming goldenrod, asters, and ironweed enticed bees and other pollinators to hang around just a little bit longer. Two Black-capped Chickadees and a fleeting warbler snacked on black-eyed susan and sunflower seeds. While four monarch caterpillars munched on milkweed, swarms of orange and black milkweed bugs warned birds that they, and the monarchs, were not on the menu.



If you can't make it to Tackapausha, you are still in luck. You can get a glimpse of it in our new video Native Plant Garden at Tackapausha Museum produced by Alene Scoblete. In the video, Marilyn Hametz explains the benefits native plants offer birds and other wildlife, and why gardeners should consider starting their own native garden. The video can be found at <http://www.ssaudubon.org/video.asp>.

Nevertheless, we hope you can come experience the magic of the garden. We can always use volunteers and you are welcome to join us the first Saturday (9:00 am – 11:00 am) and the third Tuesday (3:00 pm – 5:00 pm) of each month. For more information, contact Louise DeCesare, phone 917-548-6974 or email [Lmdecesare128@gmail.com](mailto:Lmdecesare128@gmail.com).

**South Shore Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 31**  
**Freeport, NY 11520-0031**

A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

*Americans Committed to Conservation*



**DATED MATERIAL**

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**Think Globally, but Join Locally!**

Option 1. You can join SSAS for a year by sending \$20 payable to South Shore Audubon Society using the form below. Our address is P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.

Option 2. To join NAS and your all-volunteer local chapter, you can help SSAS by joining Audubon through us for the same price that it costs if you join through NAS (we get \$0 from these dues unless you join through us). Mail the form below and your check payable to National Audubon Society to SSAS at the address above. The special rate for the first year is \$20 per household.

Renewing? Please send NAS renewals directly to NAS.

Donations to SSAS are always welcome! \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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