



Huachuca Audubon Society
P.O. Box 63
Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636

March 2011
Volume XXXIV
Number 1

TROGON NEWS

Huachuca Audubon President's Message

After some pretty brutal low temperatures (for this area at least), we seem to be headed into the up-curve of spring. That means good birding and usually a slew of festivals in the West and in Arizona. We hold off until August for our very best birding and birding festival!

I appreciate the volunteers who give us our evening programs at Cochise College and those who keep all those many walks going. We are lucky to have enthusiastic folks doing these things. We are also looking for people to help with the mundane (sometimes) but

critical work of keeping the organization going. In other words, we'll be coming up on the HAS annual meeting and elections before you know it. Although I *know* putting a request forth in this venue just doesn't work, I'm going to try again. Please contact me if you're willing to do some work to help out. It really is only a few hours a month. You can do more than that, of course, if you're willing!

There are frequently things happening in a faster manner than we can cover in a quarterly newsletter, so be sure to stay

tuned to the website for updates. There's a trogon survey opportunity coming up in May, so read up on that. There are several other citizen science efforts you can get involved in, too, if you enjoy that. I find it rewarding to contribute useful information about birds or water. Think about getting more involved in your chapter and your area. Thanks!

Tricia Gerrodette



Ron Stewart

Welcome New Members!

Carlese Ann Pratt, Benson

Penelope Roberts, Sierra
Vista

Kiyomi Foxe, Bisbee

Marguerite Calvert, Sierra
Vista

Gordon Pike, Safford

Barbara Haralson, Benson

Judy Reis, Bisbee

Gay Hill Psy Np, Sierra
Vista

Patricia Messner, Pearce

Rachel Frey, Elfrida

Margaret MacArtney,
Bisbee

Heather Kutch, Sierra
Vista

Ernest Noel, Safford

Janie Rasco, Safford

Marjorie Scott, Willcox

Miriam and Michael Moss,
Sierra Vista

Eva Nagy, Hereford

Janice Lane, Sierra Vista

Celebrate Spring on the San Pedro River

Everyone is invited to join The Friends of the San Pedro River in celebrating International Migratory Bird Day on Saturday, May 7th, at the San Pedro House. Activities will include bird walks, river walks, a hike to the beaver dams, docent-guided wagon rides, and atlatl throwing. Gray Hawk Nature Center will have snakes and reptiles on display, and Liberty Wildlife will bring its rehabilitated raptors. Archeology related activities will include a Murray Springs display and "Mammoth in a Trunk". The Kid's Ramada will feature fun activities for kids of all ages. Over a dozen like-minded organizations and agencies will have information tables. Native plants will be offered for sale at reasonable prices. Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory will close out the day with hummingbird banding. By mid-March a complete schedule of events will be posted on the FSPR website at www.sanpedroriver.org.

Energy Expo

Saturday, March 5th from 10am to 4pm at the Elgin School South of Sonoita on Highway 83, will occur a FREE open-to-the-public expo focusing on energy efficiency, conservation, and clean/renewable energy. See displays of available products and services including do-it-yourself options. Learn ways to finance energy upgrades or conserve energy for your home or business at our mini-talks and demos. Eat the delicious food available for sale. Win one of the fantastic prizes to be awarded throughout the day. For more information or to participate as a speaker or exhibitor please contact Kazz Workizer at 520-455-5085 or kazzam@azwildblue.com.

Quarterly Program Lineup

Third Tuesday of the Month at 7:00 PM, Cochise College Room 702

March 15 Rick Thompson

Birding in Hawaii: My Video Experience

In November 2010, Ricki and Rick Thompson visited and birded the beautiful Hawaiian Islands of Oahu, Kauai and Hawaii. Join Rick as he shares video of the trip. Species include some familiar ones from the mainland, endemics, introduced varieties, and even "parking lot" birds.



April 19 Arizona Game and Fish

Mountain Lions (and an Ocelot)

Join us as a local Arizona Game and Fish Department Wildlife Manager gives a presentation on Mountain Lions. Topics will include animal behavior, review of local lion research, and laws and regulations regarding Lions. And as a special added attraction we'll also see a slide show of the recent Ocelot sighting and hear about Ocelot ecology.



May 17 Bob Herrmann

Cochise County Bird Slide Show

Bob will show his recent photographs of some of the song birds and raptors from the valley and mountains surrounding Sierra Vista. Then he will take us to both the San Pedro and Sulphur Spring Valley for a photographic show of water birds. This slide show will be an entertaining presentation of some of the many species of birds that migrate through or live year round within Cochise County.



Regular Events

WEEKLY & MONTHLY

Monday bird walks on the San Pedro River (just north of Hwy 92). Meet at 8 am, Monday mornings, at the pull-off just west of the bridge, on the north side of Highway 92 (near Palominas; there is a rusty Quonset hut just before the turn-off, and a gate numbered 10663.)

2nd Wednesday bird walk at 8 am at San Pedro House (sponsored by Friends of the San Pedro and HAS).

Saturday interpretive walk, 8 am. Meet at the San Pedro House just west of the river, south of Hwy 90.

Sunday Environmental Operations Park bird walk at 8 am, in Sierra Vista. Limited to 20 participants with two docents. Sponsored by Huachuca Audubon, Friends of the San Pedro, and SE AZ Bird Observatory.

4th Saturday bird walk at San Pedro House, 7 am April-September (8 am October-March). (South off Hwy 90 just west of the San Pedro River). *Note winter start times (8 a.m.). More information at <http://www.huachuca-audubon.org> and <http://www.sanpedroriver.org>.*

Introduction to Birding

with Rick Romea



Wednesday, March 2, 9, 16 and 23
*Sierra Vista Campus, Room 702
6 to 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 26, 2011
*Field Trip to San Pedro
7:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Saturday, April 2, 2011
*Field Trip to Huachuca Mountains
7:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Cost: \$79 inclusive*
*Participants will provide their own transportation to each location

For information/registration call,
520-515-5492
email
training@cochise.edu
or visit our website
www.cochise.edu/cll




Ghost Bird

Ghost Bird, the critically acclaimed environmental documentary from director Scott Crocker, explores the remarkable rediscovery of the Ivory-billed woodpecker in the swamps of Arkansas, taking a closer look at the role politics, science and culture took in shaping the unprecedented recovery effort.

The New York Times wrote, "Scott Crocker has turned a bird-watching tale into a multilayered story that will fascinate practically everybody in "Ghost Bird," a witty, wistful documentary".

Audubon members can purchase the expanded DVD of the movie at a special discounted price of \$15.99. You can access this offer by going to <http://ghostbirdmovie.wordpress.com/audubon/>

For each DVD purchased, Ghost Bird will also donate an additional \$2 to your Audubon chapter. That is a combined 20% off the retail price and our way of showing our appreciation to you for working to preserve and conserve birds and their habitats.

2010 Ramsey Canyon Bird Count

The 2010 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (RCCBC) was again a resounding success. With 155 species reported, this was the 4th highest count in our 41-year history. We also had the 2nd highest number of participants (87), which made covering our circle much easier than in many past years. The 16,047 total birds counted also reversed a sad trend seen over most of our recent counts in which we have been recording fewer and fewer birds.

All of this was made possible by a combination of a year of good rainfall, great weather in which to hold a count, and your participation.

As with prior years, bird species and numbers, as well as bird distribution across the circle, varied from previous counts. Because of the abundance of food sources throughout the Huachucas, mountain species were less concentrated along riparian corridors and were therefore more challenging to detect. While food supplies were also abundant in the mesquite grasslands and along the river, the openness of these latter areas made detecting birds easier than in the mountains. One of the results was fairly high counts for many sparrow and blackbird species.

As always, the EOP was productive for waterfowl and

water birds of many different types. We also counted six hummingbird species. The most unusual birds seen included 2 Blue Grosbeak, 3 Wilson's Warbler, 4 Hepatic Tanager, 4 Scott's Oriole, and one each, Greater Yellowlegs, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Calliope Hummingbird, Botteri's Sparrow, and Baird's Sparrow. We also counted an unidentified species of swallow.

We had record high counts for several species including White-winged Dove, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Anna's Hummingbird, Northern Mockingbird, Yellow-Rumped Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Hepatic Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, and Scott's Oriole.

As always, there were a few birds that got away. With only one Eastern Bluebird reported, we almost missed a species that has been seen on all but one previous count. We did miss both the Western Bluebird and Williamson's Sapsucker, birds that have been regulars over the last ten years.

Many thanks to everyone who helped in making this count such a success and a special thank-you to Robert Weissler, our secondary compiler, for all his efforts.

The compiled results of this year's count will soon be available on the HAS website - <http://www.huachuca-audubon.org/CBC/RCCBC.php>. Mark your calendars for next year's RCCBC, which will be held on Saturday 17 December.

Ted Mouras Compiler, RCCBC

Audubon Arizona's Migration Celebration

Join us for our annual nature festival, Migration Celebration! Explore the world of bats, butterflies, and birds as you stroll along our nature trail. See live hawks and hummingbirds up-close and make your very own wings. Crafts, food, activities, and family-fun for everyone!

Saturday, April 9, 2011, 9:00 – 3:00 at the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center, 3131 Central Avenue, Phoenix. Admission is free. Information at <http://riosalado.audubon.org>



Upper San Pedro Water Sentinels Program

Huachuca Audubon Society (HAS), in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Friends of the San Pedro River (FSPR) are establishing a new citizen science program under the auspices of the Sierra Club, called the Upper San Pedro Water Sentinels (WS). This program is focused on activities within the SPRNCA and consists of three projects: river clean-up and rehabilitation, water quality testing, and well water level monitoring. We are coming to you first to determine if you are interested in participating in one or more of these projects. Below is a more detailed description of each.

The river clean-up and rehabilitation project will be managed by the FSPR and started with a river clean-up event on 4 December. Initially focused on cleaning up trash in the river corridor, this project will likely expand to include other activities, including the removal of tamarisk, bermuda and johnson grass from portions of the gallery forest in order to facilitate the recruitment of new cottonwood and willow.

The water quality testing project involves conducting a variety of tests of river water quality at 5 locations on the SPR 4 times a year. Tests at each site should take no more than 30 - 45 minutes to conduct and the 5 sites are located immediately adjacent to the bridges over the river at Palominas (Hwy 92), Hereford Road, Hwy 90 (SPH), Charleston, and Fairbank. Three teams will accomplish these tasks. Team one will handle Palominas and Hereford Bridges, team two, the Hwy 90 Bridge, and team three, Charleston and Fairbanks bridges.

20 of the 24 team members received training on how to conduct the water quality tests at a half-day training session on 22 January and the first data collection event

occurred on 10 February. All three teams will conduct their tests on the same morning and bring their data forms and water samples to the SPH NLT 1245, where the samples will be collected and then transported to a lab in Tucson for testing.

The third project involves evaluation of water depth in 16 wells located in the vicinity of Murray Springs, 4 times a year. These water depths will be measured using manual methods (tape). Team Two will conduct both the water quality test at the Hwy 90 bridge and measure the water levels at the wells at Murray Springs. Paul Brown, BLM Hydrologist, trained team two participants on 10 February and help the team to complete the first well depth data collection effort once training is completed.

If you are interested in learning more about the WS program and/or participating in any of these projects, please contact Ted Mouras, at tedmouras@mindspring.com

Ted Mouras



Ron Stewart

Life and Death

The landscaping “theme” is pretty sparse at our place in southeast Arizona. Desert broom, clusters of prickly pear cactus, a single palo verde tree, and about a dozen mesquite trees pretty much sums up the inventory of native plants. The previous owners planted one each cottonwood, juniper, rose bush and five peach trees. The neighborhood etiquette seems to be to mow the grasses, both robust native bunchgrasses and what I fear is crabgrass.

The reasons for mowing are two-fold: to reduce fuels in case of a fire and to better see any Mojave rattlesnakes that might be out and about. The mesquite trees in the yard contain wicked-stout thorns—some longer than 2 inches. Furthermore, some “sucker” branches that spring from the tree’s base and arc downward toward their tip are a hazard while mowing “the lawn,” so we decided to prune some of the trees’ lower limbs.

Back in the day, I served as an inspector on various restoration projects: road removal (“decommissioning”), planting trees and shrubs in streamside areas and the conversion of old jeep roads to foot trails. Not infrequently, I inspected the work of Redwood Community Action Agency on such projects. Their field supervisor was Sungnome Madrone. Restoration was not merely a paycheck to Sungnome: it was a creed, a calling that he felt compelled to pass on to those whose work he supervised. He was an innovator, someone who always looked for a way to do the job better and more efficiently while minimizing impacts.

To illustrate, many roads slated for decommissioning have fallen into disuse and have partially revegetated with small trees and brush. One of the first steps of the project is to clear the roadway of vegetation. Some field supervisors regard this vegetation as a liability, as they have to identify a place to dispose of it—not an easy task in the steep terrain of the coast ranges or Klamath Mountains. However, Sungnome regarded this vegetation as an asset. You see, bales of straw are usually hauled to the site and then placed on the newly disturbed soil for erosion control. Various kinds of straw—certified weed-free or rice straw—have been used over the years to eliminate the inadvertent importation of weed seeds to the site. Despite these precautions, weeds have colonized many sites, even though certified weed-free or rice straw was used.

Of course, using trees and brush as mulch didn’t cover the ground to the extent that straw did, but it was readily available, weed free, and had the added bonus of possibly containing viable seeds to jumpstart the revegetation process.



Robert A. Behrstock – Photo taken in Hereford, AZ

So, back to the story at hand. Staring at a pile of mesquite branch trimmings, “What would Sungnome do?” I thought to myself. “That’s easy. Cover—to escape both predators and extremes of heat and cold—is in short supply in the yard. The best cover near our bird feeders is actually an old gnarled pear tree just the other side of the boundary fence. Why haul the material off to a distant corner of the yard when I can just build brush piles, especially near the bird feeders?” So that’s what I did.

Several weeks later, I glanced out the window to see a Cooper’s Hawk land on a brush pile. A small flock of sparrows—Lark and White-crowns—foraged for grass seed on the ground beneath the pile. Agitated and clearly interested in the sparrows, the “Coop” shifted about on top of the pile, peering this way and that, searching for a passageway through the brush. The hawk seemed to sense that he couldn’t navigate through the thorn-encrusted pile. Spellbound, I forgot whatever it was I was doing to watch this deadly cat-and-mouse game. *Sparrows: if you stay put, you’re safe where you are.* Then, to my amazement, the Cooper’s Hawk began to negotiate through the brush pile. My allegiance shifted somewhat, as I considered the damage that 2-inch-long thorns could do to the hawk. Inch by inch, the hawk crept closer. Meanwhile, the sparrows grew more agitated, creeping along the ground, putting distance between them and the hawk without abandoning the pile altogether.



Karen LeMay – Photo taken in Hereford, AZ

Suddenly, a White-Crowned Sparrow flew from the pile. In a flash, the Cooper's extricated itself from the thorny brush pile, hot in pursuit. Several wing strokes later, the hawk caught up to the sparrow, seized it, and landed in the neighbor's pear tree. This tree, planted for its fruit or shade, and serving as cover for our yard birds before alighting onto our feeders, now assumed a new role: that of plucking perch.

Although we empathized with the sparrow, "Everyone's gotta eat," is a phrase I often hear myself saying. Truth be told, we wondered what took Cooper's Hawks so long to case our feeders. We'd built up a lively flock of feeder birds over the months, while viewing only a token Sharp-shin or two and occasional Cooper's. Trite—and over-used— but true: "If you provide it, they will come."

Tom Leskiw March 25, 2011

Huachuca Audubon Society Field Trips

Check the web site (<http://www.huachuca-audubon.org>) for more detail.

March 5, Saturday , 7:00 a.m. HAS "Sedge Wren", Peña Blanca Lake. Meet at City Hall.

March 15, Tuesday, 7:00 a.m. HAS "Sora" field trip to Whitewater Draw/Sulphur Springs Valley for shorebirds. Meet at City Hall.

March 23, Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. HAS "Vermilion Flycatcher" bird walk along the San Pedro River and grasslands. Meet at San Pedro House.

April 5, Tuesday, 7:00 a.m. HAS "Gray Hawk" field trip to St. David. Meet at City Hall.

April 16, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR Hike: "Summer Tanager" at St. David. Meet at City Hall.

April 20, Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. HAS "Trogon" field trip to Ramsey Canyon. Meet at Ramsey Canyon Preserve parking lot.

April 27, Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. HAS "Summer Tanager" bird walk along the San Pedro River and grasslands. Meet at San Pedro House.

May 4, Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. HAS "Olive Warbler" Sawmill Canyon on Fort Huachuca. Meet at Gateway Park.

May 7, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR "Spring Festival/Intl Migratory Bird Day" bird walk along the San Pedro River. Meet at San Pedro House.

May 9, Monday, 7:00 a.m. HAS "Red-faced Warbler" hike up Miller Canyon in the Huachucas. Meet at Forest Service trailhead parking lot below Beatty's Orchard.

May 24, Tuesday, 7:00 a.m. HAS "Trogon" field trip to Huachuca Canyon on Fort Huachuca. Meet at Gateway Park.

A Winter Descent to Schist

When a hiking friend mentioned he'd made reservations a year in advance for a group hike to Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the Grand Canyon in January of this year, I thought he was crazy. Nearly a year later, when he offered me the place of a woman in the group who had cancelled, it took me a couple of days to decide I'd be crazy not to take advantage of the offer. It also meant planning and preparation since, as the National Park Service warns on its trail description website, "Depending on how prepared you are, your trip can be a vacation or a challenge, a revelation or an ordeal."



For those of you looking forward to a bird list in this account, here it is: pinyon jay, common raven, canyon wren, dark-eyed (Oregon) junco. I thought for a moment I had a condor, but it turned out to be two ravens perched close together on a cliff. The binoculars were left at

home in favor of keeping weight to a minimum and resting on the pelvis. Besides, the star of this hike is geology. Most of the plants were dormant, though it was nice to see *Agave utahensis* and *Ephedra viridis*, species that don't occur in southeastern AZ.

Friends who had hiked the Canyon before said that walking the steep, rocky trails in the Huachuca's would be more than adequate preparation for the well-groomed, relatively gradually graded South Kaibab and Bright Angel Trails, and we put in time in Ramsey, Brown, Miller and Montezuma Canyons in the weeks before the adventure. Still, looking down into the canyon on the eve of the trek, to the cleft where the river ran, hidden from view, it was hard to imagine that we'd be looking up at the rim from Bright Angel Creek almost a mile below us in fewer than 24 hours. One of a pair of young men nearby remarked to the other, "Wow, I wonder how you get down there. Must be by helicopter."

On the morning of our departure on January 25, we knew we'd be better off walking up the icy, top 1-½ miles of the Bright Angel Trail, part of which follows drainages, and down the shorter, but steeper and exposed South Kaibab Trail (elevation 7,260 ft. at the top). We also knew that we had gotten extremely lucky with weather, since the forecast for the next three days was for unseasonably warm, sunny and calm conditions. Less than an hour down South Kaibab Trail we encountered a hiker for whom the climb seemed more ordeal than revelation as he asked, panting, "How much farther?" and was distressed to hear he had at least a mile to go. He had a plane to catch.

Imagine having to watch where you're stepping, to avoid ice, the occasional series of stair-like drops, and mule droppings, when

you're entering one of the most spectacular landscapes in the world. We started on the Kaibab Plateau, whose fossil-laden limestone is 270 million years old, and were descending through strata sometimes hundreds of feet thick, on our way to igneous and metamorphic rocks in the canyon bottom that are almost 2 billion years old. "Humbling" doesn't begin to describe the feeling.



By the time we reached the Ranch, 7 miles by trail and 4,700 ft. lower in elevation, our legs were wobbly and we were ready for that steak dinner awaiting us after we threw our gear on bottom bunks and explored the canyon floor. The air temperature at the river was 20 degrees warmer than at the rim, and we soaked our swollen feet in the frigid water of Bright Angel Creek. In summer, cottonwoods there would provide shade from the hot sun. A campground and rental cabins are also available at Phantom Ranch.

The next day was spent hiking one or more of the trails that meet at Phantom Ranch, the longest being North Kaibab, which follows Bright Angel Creek before climbing to 8,240 at the North Rim 14 miles away. The upper part of this trail is closed in winter due to snow. We also got to meet Tater Tot, the mule that

carried one member of our party to the Ranch. She was the only rider signed up for her mule trip on both hiking days, and filled us with information about mules and the canyon that she learned from her guide on the ride down.

It's a daunting view, the rim from the river, 10 miles and 4,300 ft. away up the Bright Angel Trail. Fueled with a breakfast of bacon, eggs, pancakes and canned peaches, we started in groups of 2 or more when it was light enough to see the trail. First west along the Colorado, then south up Pipe Creek to Garden Creek, out onto Bright Angel Shale on top of Tapeats sandstone at Indian Garden, the trail finally switch-backed up through layers of limestone, sandstone and shale to the Rim Trail at Bright Angel Lodge. It was gratifying to discover that here, as on other treks, it was more physically taxing to descend than to ascend. Some of us even beat Tater Tot to the top, because he got regular, required rests.

Lots of people make this journey, one way or another. About one percent of approximately 5 million annual visitors to the Park walk to the river and back. Some do it in one day. Seeing the Canyon is impressive. Walking into it, even if only partway down to one of the rest stops on the south rim trails, provides a more intimate look into a place of overwhelming evidence of the history of our planet's geologic evolution, and a reminder that *Homo sapiens* may be only a temporary resident of a life-nurturing planet. It's not just humbling; it's a reminder that we have a responsibility to use our planet's finite resources wisely if we want to make our stay a long one.

For an excellent series of photos of this hike taken in springtime, check out the following website: <http://www.genehanson.com/c2003b/cany2003.htm>

Ginny Bealer

Elegant Trogon Survey in Huachuca Mountains

As of press time final details are still to be worked out but please mark Sunday, May 29, on your calendar as the probable day for the Elegant Trogon Survey in the Huachuca Mountains. Rick Taylor will coordinate the survey with some support from the Sierra Vista Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest. For the survey to be truly successful, support from the Huachuca Audubon Society and participation of a large number of surveyors will be essential. A training and organizational day with explanation of survey protocols will probably take place on Saturday, May 28.

There are 18 canyons where trogons have been recorded in the Huachucas, including about 6 (depending on how they are divided) on Fort Huachuca. Ideally, the leader of each survey team should have previous experience with Elegant Trogons. Given the terrain, it is very advisable for surveyors to have at least one partner. Obviously some canyons require more hiking than others, so assignments need to factor in this criterion as well as birding ability. Finally, the major trogon canyons in the Huachucas should have multiple teams of surveyors. For example, to obtain an accurate count for the area, the Garden Canyon complex requires that different teams survey McClure, Scheelite, and Sawmill Canyons, as well as the main drainage, all on the same morning to exclude any birds being counted twice. On the other hand, some canyons will probably not have any trogons in late May of 2011. That data is also useful to land management planners. It will be important that surveyors begin on the lower end of their assigned territories by 6 a.m.

Please monitor the HAS website - www.huachuca-audubon.org - for updated information.

Volunteers Wanted For Bird Monitoring in the Huachucas

For the third straight year, the Huachuca Audubon Society (HAS) and U.S. Forest Service are collaborating to monitor the effects of vegetation treatments on birds breeding in the Huachuca Mountains. The treatments in east side canyons are designed to reduce fire hazard. Volunteers adopt a 10-acre survey block within treated or untreated sites, which they visit three times – twice in May and once in July. Volunteers work in pairs to complete surveys taking about 3 hours. Training sessions will include a series of free evening classes to be offered April 7, 15, and 21 to improve or freshen up bird identification skills and teach the survey protocol. Classes will be 7:00 - 8:00 PM at the Ranger Station (5990 S. Highway 92). Field trips will take place on Saturday mornings April 9 and 30 with times and locations to be announced in April. Data obtained through the study will help the Forest Service to improve its vegetation management practices to benefit birds while reducing fire danger. If you are interested in volunteering for this project or need more information, please contact Robert Weissler (weissler@aves.org) at HAS or the district wildlife biologist with the Forest Service Glenn Frederick (gfrederick@fs.fed.us or call 520-803-2827).

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