



Kákya Táymut

KUK-yuh TIE-moot, Umatilla Indian Translation: *Bird News*

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Snowfall Provides Challenges, Opportunities

Snowfall can be a double-edge sword for bird life. For perching birds, which make their living browsing through brush and weeds, it can be the kiss of death — literally. For those special birds that make their living off of these ground dwellers though, it can provide an opportunity to live a little longer.

My brother Doug and his 12 year old son Chris and I saw firsthand this time-honored struggle between raptor and prey after a recent snowfall while duck hunting on the Umatilla River a few weeks ago. Doug, who lives on the Big Island of Hawaii, times his annual visit to Pendleton to coincide with the duck migration through our area. Unfortunately, the ducks have apparently breached the United Airlines flight reservation system because they invariably slink away about the time he arrives each year. This year was no exception.

Almost three inches of snow lay on the ground when we crunched our way in the dark to the blind to throw out decoys. It quickly became apparent though that nothing with webbed feet was flying. However, dozens of Dark-eyed Juncos, American Goldfinches and the occasional Song Sparrows were feeding on nearby weeds and catkins in the alders overhead. They were pretty easy to spot in the growing light against the fresh white snow. Apparently the raptors thought so too because that's when the show began.

The morning's first strafing run came from a fearless Sharp-shinned Hawk. This attack scattered the nearby flocks of song birds although a large portion of the juncos ended up practically in our blind or in the alder trees a few yards away. "Neat trick," I thought to myself, "those birds are using us as a human shield so the hawk won't chase them." I was dutifully impressed.

The Sharpie, eyeing this tactic from a tree 30 feet away, was not nearly as impressed

though. Without hesitation, he flew right into the tree with those juncos — scattering them like pin balls — then proceeded to land on a branch 15 feet away where he glared down at the three of us. So much for human shields. Now, I was *really* impressed.

Next up was a female Northern Harrier which made several swoops over low-lying brush in an attempt to flush more juncos but to no avail. The Harrier seemed to be more interested in looking for mice or voles than birds, and it was no challenge for the smaller birds to see her coming long before she could connect. I told Chris to look out for a similar-sized bird but gray and white in color. Right on cue, here came a male Northern Harrier looking for fur balls in the snow.

By mid-morning the Sharpie had returned over and over to make silent sneak attacks on the juncos but failed to connect with each pass. I guess when 30 pair's of eyes are looking your way it is hard to stay hidden. However, the Sharpie was diligent and finally did connect on a junco. We watched as this agile predator singled out a lone bird, followed it into the alder branches then gyrated skyward just as the junco made the fatal mistake of heading for blue sky. Two wing beats later the little fellow was in the talons of the Sharpie not 5 feet above our heads. Talk about a front row seat! Then, within minutes, the remainder of the flock had returned to the weed patch to feed, oblivious to what had just happened. All in a day's work, I guess, for the hawk and the juncos.

Since the ducks were likely sunbathing in California, we were entertained over the next four days by a diversity of raptors (six different species in all) including a Bald Eagle (a lifer for Chris); two male Northern Harriers fighting over a catch which was dropped into a tall alder tree then later retrieved by one of the birds; a Prairie Falcon that flew right over



us and a Red-tailed Hawk, which made a valiant 300-yard, mid-air pursuit of a Starling only to run out of gas and have to throttle back 10 yards from his target. I thought, "Next time, Mr. Starling, next time..."

No question about it. Snowfall turns the tide in favor of predators. Their prey tend to congregate and are easier to spot against a white background. Plus, the colder weather simply slows down the metabolism of older, weaker birds which make easy targets for sharp-eyed predators.

And what of the three mighty duck hunters? Well, three of Oregon's webbed-footed avians will grace a Hawaiian dinner table this winter. And, I am pleased to report that the decoys didn't float away (this time), no one had leaky waders, and the companionship was priceless. Hunting when it was +7 degrees set a new all time low-temperature record for Doug and myself (my wife Sharon just throws up her hands and proclaims, "You're ALL idiots!!"). But she doesn't understand. We go for the memories...and maybe the glass of scotch at the end of the day to console our wounds.

Of course, you never know what may wander by when you stand hidden in a brushy backwater in the river bottom for four hours. On the final day, about 8:00 a.m., I looked out the back of the blind and spotted five Common Mergansers floating downriver through the rapids coming right at us. These birds are year-round residents on the river so it wasn't a surprise. Without warning, though, a river otter appeared out of the brush 30 feet away and hopped/ran through the snow toward the approaching ducks. The otter had a thick brown pelt and looked to be in prime condition.

As the mergansers floated downriver I thought to myself, "What an odd coincidence to have turned around just as five mergansers floated by and then this otter comes out of nowhere to intersect their approach and swims right into the water after them." Then I remembered — mergansers eat fish. Otters eat fish. And there are only so many fish to feed hungry mouths.

Whether you are a hawk or a junco or a merganser or an otter, life is a struggle. Sometimes, if we are lucky, you and I witness this struggle and can share it with others. And that's one of the reasons we go birding!

Contributed by Jack Simons

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Christmas Bird Count

December 29, 2007

**For more information, contact
Aaron Skirvin umatbirder@yahoo.com
or 276-1948**

Bird Club Meeting and Potluck

6:30 p.m., January 10, 2008

Potluck starting at 6:30 p.m.

Program to be Determined

**Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton**

Bird Club Meeting and Potluck

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., February 14, 2008

Jack Simons presents

**"The Artwork of John James
Audubon"**

**Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton**

Bird Club Meeting

7:00 p.m., March 13, 2008

**Book Reviews by Russ Betts,
Haval Norman,
Nancy Brown, and Jane Holmes**

**Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton**



Bird Club Meeting and Potluck

6:30 p.m., April 10, 2008

Potluck starts at 6:30 p.m.

Program by Dave Herr

Pendleton First Christian Church on
N. Main Street in Pendleton

Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 29, 2007

THE ANNUAL UMATILLA COUNTY CHRISTMAS Bird Count is coming up in just 6 days. Here are the details on how you can participate. The 21st official Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count will take place on **SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2007**. This local count is part of the national 107th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. If you are interested in the history and count data accumulated for the hundreds of counts across the country, please visit Audubon's website (www.audubon.org) then click on the link to Christmas Bird Count.

Last year, 23 bird counters saw 72 species of birds, and tallied a total of 9,137 individual birds in our circle. Our count circle is 15 miles in diameter, with the center located about 7 miles southeast of Pendleton. We welcome **everyone** (from beginning birder to expert) to help count birds on December 29. There are no major changes in Audubon's rules from last year as to how we conduct our count. The participant fee remains at \$5 per birder for those participants older than 18 years of age, and each participant will receive a CBC issue of *American Birds*.

Our count circle is divided into four areas, and each area has a Coordinator (see below). Each Coordinator is responsible for organizing and managing the bird counters in his/her area. To get involved, each interested participant must contact directly one of the Area Coordinators to join that group for count day. The coordinator will set a place and time for his/her team members to meet on count morning. If you want to help count birds on December 30, please contact one of the coordinators listed on the next page:

- ◆ **Area 1** (Pendleton, Wildhorse Creek, Patawa Creek and Riverside)

Jack Simons — home: 276-8566

- ◆ **Area 2** (Umatilla River and Cayuse)
Jenny Barnett — home: 276-0639; cell: 310-0374
- ◆ **Area 3** (McKay Reservoir, Upper McKay Creek, and Birch Creek)
June and Duane Whitten — home: 276-9019
- ◆ **Area 4** (Mission, Emigrant Hill and Poverty Flats)
Aaron Skirvin — home: 276-1948; cell: 215-0761

Bird enthusiasts can also choose to do feeder counts if you have an active feeder in the count circle. If you want to do a feeder count, contact Aaron Skirvin (see contact information below). All Christmas Bird Count participants will get together for a count-down at the end of the day and compile the count results. Abby's Pizza on Southgate in Pendleton has reserved the banquet room for us from 4:00 – 7:30 pm that evening. Please contact Aaron Skirvin (276-1948, home or umatbirder@yahoo.com) if you have any questions about the areas or feeder counts or how to participate.

LET'S GO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTING ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2007!!!

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

Poet's Corner

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

A friend calls you "sharpie",
and it's a good name for you,
Fast, light, clever, sharp-shinned hawk.

Subtle gray and brown
You are only a little bigger than the birds you hunt.

I did not invite you here, at least not on purpose.

But I invited flocks of birdies
With food on cold winter days.
And sharpies feel the cold too.

High calorie seeds stoke the furnaces of my little
birds' hearts,
But sharpies need hot meat to survive.

And so it seems I have put out more than one kind of
bird-food:
Seeds for the birdies
And birdies for you.

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Birds, Bears, and Flowers of Alaska

At the December Bird Club meeting, four of our members shared slides of their adventures in Alaska in 2007. Last July, June and Duane Whitten, Betty Klepper, and Fern Oliver traveled to south-central Alaska for some birding, sight-seeing, and national park viewing. One of their objectives was to visit Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks, which are located across the Cook Inlet from the cities of Homer and Soldotna.

Although they achieved their main objective, most of their time was spent birding and sight-seeing on the Kenai Peninsula, Cook Inlet, and Kenai Fjords. The weather cooperated beautifully on their boat trips out of Homer. They were also lucky to find that the lady captain of the boat was a birder, and she specifically took them to locations where they could find their most sought-after birds, including Parakeet Auklet and Kittlitz's Murrelet. On the boat trips they saw thousands of seabirds, such as Glaucous Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwakes, cormorants (including Red-faced), loons of all stripes, murrets, and puffins (both Tufted and Horned). Humpbacked whales and sea otters were also spotted from the deck of the boat.

They had plenty of exciting wildlife, too, in the yard of the Bed and Breakfast where they stayed: mother and calf moose and black bears. Especially surprising was the large number of Sandhill Cranes that leisurely strolled in the yards of many of the residences in the area. This is very different behavior compared to the Sandhills that we see in Oregon during spring and summer.

Their trip into Katmai National Park exposed the group to exhilarating, close-up looks at Alaskan brown bears. The name makes them sound cute and cuddly, but they are really BIG grizzlies!! The bears, mostly ignoring the people, concentrated on catching the abundant salmon in the river. The visitors from Oregon were very close to the bears while the bears fished in the falls and channel of the river. Although the group never felt threatened by the bears, it still makes one stop and think about the fact that, in this habitat, people are not at the top of the food chain!

Fern, who took many of the photos on the trip, told us about the bountiful and showy flowers they saw on the trip. I guess we don't think of Alaska as a place to visit for its wildflowers, but Fern's photos convinced the audience of their variety and abundance. Fireweed, columbine,

lilies, lupines and others flourished in the wild and gardens on the Kenai Peninsula.

Thank you, Duane, June, Betty, and Fern for sharing your photos and tales of your trip to Alaska.

Contributed by Aaron Skirvin

Thanks Members

Our annual fund-raiser at the December Bird Club meeting was another success thanks to the generous raffle and auction donations, purchase of raffle tickets and spirited bidding on auction items by club members. At the end of the evening, the members had raised \$459.50 for the club!

The Pendleton Bird Club wishes to recognize club members Lorna Waltz, Betty Klepper and Jeanne Jensen for organizing the fun and productive fund raiser. Thank you, Lorna, Betty and Jeanne for volunteering your time, skills and efforts to help the club.

Many, many thanks, too, to all who contributed items for the raffle and silent auction. Among the items contributed were bird paintings, books, feeders, bird seed, ornaments, note cards, a lovely beaded hummingbird, and so many more nice items.

With the proceeds from the fund raiser we can continue the club's website, occasionally bring in outside speakers, on special occasions pay rental fees for meeting rooms, make a donation to the First Christian Church for allowing us to use their Fellowship Room free-of-charge for monthly meetings, replace and repair nest boxes on the Bluebird Trails, expand the Bluebird Trails, and prepare Umatilla County bird checklists.

Thank you club members for your generous support of the Pendleton Bird Club!

Bird of the Month – Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulous*)

Bohemian Waxwings are considered an irruptive species in Umatilla County; some winters there are many and some winters there are none on the annual bird list for the county. This year is one of the years they are showing up, usually in flocks and sometimes associating with the very similar Cedar Waxwings. Carefully check out flocks of Cedars Waxwings, and there may be one or more Bohemians with them.



Also, those very large, winter flocks (100+ birds) of waxwings are often Bohemians.

The Bohemian is slightly, though noticeably, larger than the Cedar and has two small white patches on the wings. The white patches will help identify the



Bohemian, as well as their dark bellies and rusty-brown under-tail coverts.

How did this species acquire their name? The waxwing part is easy; the red slash on their secondary wing feathers looks like droplets of shiny wax. The Bohemian part is a bit more obscure. Bohemian Waxwings do live in Bohemia (a region of Western Czechoslovakia), so their name could have originated there. More apt, however, is their gypsy life-style, moving from place to place and never knowing where they will show up. The Bohemian Waxwings tend to have a rather nomadic existence and a vagabond life-style.

Both species of waxwings are fond of berries in winter, such as juniper or mountain ash, and may flock to those trees in winter. Year-round, they eat berries, flowers, fruits, tree sap, and the young are fed berries and insects. If you see waxwings fly-catching in late spring, they are probably feeding babies. Bohemian Waxwings breed in Northwest Canada and Alaska, usually in coniferous forests or open mixed woodlands. The nest is built of twigs, grass, moss, and lined with plant down. Their wintering grounds evidently depend on the weather and food sources. They spend their winter all across Canada and visit many of the northwest states.

Bohemian Waxwings are sleek brownish-gray birds that are best described as brown velvet. They are, indeed, handsome birds with a crest, short tails with a yellow tip, and the small red slash on the wing that resembles wax. Bohemian Waxwings are 8.25" in length, about an inch longer than Cedar Waxwings.

In flight, the might be mistaken for

starlings, due to their size, plump bodies, short tails, and pointed wings.

This winter, Bohemian Waxwings are occurring in various places in Umatilla County. They are fairly easy to find since they tend to stay in flocks. Check out any area that has berries or fruit. And, with a little patience, you may see some Bohemian Waxwings fly in to feed on the fruit. They have been seen along the River Parkway in Pendleton, in the vicinity of the McNary Wildlife Area, Pendleton Community Park in SW Pendleton, North Hill in Pendleton, the neighborhood near McKay Dam, and other locations with berries or fruit.

Submitted by June Whitten

January 10 Bird Club Potluck

The Pendleton Bird Club meeting on January 10, 2008, will begin with a potluck at 6:30 p.m. at the Pendleton First Christian Church. Please bring a dish of your choice, your own plates and silverware, cups or glasses, and serving spoons or forks. We plan to leave the basement at the church at least as tidy as it is on our arrival without anyone having to do dishes or much clean-up. Coffee will be provided.

In addition to the delicious food, our potlucks offer a great time to socialize with fellow club members and guests. We hope you are able to join us on January 10, 2008. Anyone needing additional information about the potluck may contact Lorna Waltz clwaltz@eoni.com or 276-6353.

VISIT THE BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

Bird checklists, ID Challenge, Club Member's Photo Gallery, Newsletter Archive and more.

www.pendletonbirders.org

November – December Bird Sightings

One look out the window at the snow will verify that winter has already arrived. Cold temperatures and snow mean that back yard bird feeders are seeing a lot of action. At least this is true at my feeders. Although I (Dave Herr) don't keep an accurate count, I would guess that I have over 200 **Dark-eyed Juncos** as well as **American Goldfinches, House Finches and Sparrows, Morning Doves**, a few **White-crowned Sparrows** and a **Song Sparrow** using my feeders. Of course with this concentration



of feeding birds, the resident **Cooper's** and **Sharp-shinned Hawks** are keeping everyone on their toes.

It seems the snowy weather is also concentrating other birds of prey. On November 27, Connie Betts reported seeing a large number of **Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Northern Harriers** and a **Rough-legged Hawk** along Highway 11 between Pendleton and Milton-Freewater. Driving along the old Adams Road on December 3, I found more than 20 hawks bucking the wind over Wildhorse Creek. Running their raptor survey in Northern Umatilla County on December 9, Mike and MerryLynn Denny and Ginger and Rodger Shoemake recorded numerous raptors of **12 species**, including **273 Red-tailed Hawks, 12 Rough-legged Hawks, 2 Ferruginous Hawks** and **62 Northern Harriers**.

The Pendleton Community Park Report: Connie and Russ Betts continue to keep track of the birds seen at the Community Park along McKay Creek. Connie reported on November 27, the water level had dropped, but there were still 25-30 **Mallards** present as well as a couple of **Red-tailed Hawks**. Checking the park on December 3, Connie finally found a **Greater Yellowlegs**. Connie finds this species most winters along McKay Creek near the park. The same day she also found **84 Mallards, 32 Canada Geese, 200 American Robins, a Great Blue Heron** and (as expected) a large flock of **European Starlings**. On December 8, Connie counted **54 Mallards, a Prairie Falcon** and a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**. They looked for the Greater Yellowlegs again but couldn't relocate it. Connie wonders if the Sharp-shinned is the same one that hit her window earlier in the day. Russ and Connie reported seeing 3 **Gadwalls** among the usual **Mallards** on December 12. They saw two **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** in the park on December 14, and one was flashing his red crown at the other.

With **Bohemian Waxwings** being reported to the north, east, and south of Umatilla County in the past few weeks, it was only a matter of time before someone found them locally. Sure enough, on November 30, Barbara Clark reported seeing between 50 and 80 **Bohemian Waxwings** feeding in a mountain ash tree in her yard near McKay Dam. This was the first of several reports of Bohemian Waxwing in Umatilla County this winter. December 2, Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten found one **Bohemian Waxwing** with a flock of **Cedar Waxwings** at McNary Wildlife Area. On December 7, Aaron heard and saw one **Bohemian Waxwing** flying over his Pendleton home Doug

and Betty Radke reported about **200 waxwings**, mostly **Bohemians**, near their home on the North Hill in Pendleton. This flock stayed around for a few days and may still be in the area. On November 17, Russ and Connie Betts saw a flock of 15 **Bohemian Waxwings** in the trees along McKay Creek in SW Pendleton. This was a life bird for Connie. On December 18, the Betts saw a flock of about **300 waxwings** flying over their neighborhood near McKay Creek in SW Pendleton. Although the Betts didn't see the birds long enough to make identification, a very large flock of waxwings in Umatilla County in winter is almost certainly composed mainly of Bohemians.

In late November and again on December 7, Craig Kvern reported seeing several **Short-eared Owls** along North Cayuse Road a few miles northeast of Mission. On December 9, Craig saw 4 **Short-eared Owls** in the CRP fields near St. Andrews Mission southeast of Mission.

On December 1, Jack Simons had an unexpected sighting. He was walking in his pasture behind his home along the Umatilla River and thought he heard an Osprey calling. Looking around he spotted a mature **Bald Eagle** chasing an **OSPREY** through the falling snow. Although common in the summer, finding an **Osprey** this late in the year is very unusual and apparently the latest sighting of Osprey in the fall.

On December 2, I found one **Short-eared Owl** bucking the wind as it flew near Highway 11 on the outskirts of Pendleton. The same day, I drove the old highway (Adams Road) down Wildhorse Creek from the city of Adams and saw 20 or so **Red-tailed** and **Rough-legged Hawks** as well as several **Northern Harriers**.

Birding in the west county on December 2, Aaron and June found 2 **Pacific** and one **Common Loon** along the Columbia River. Aaron noted **Common Goldeneyes** are starting to gather on the river. Jack Simons had a **Spotted Towhee**, "a lot of pesky" **Red-winged Blackbirds**, and some **Mallards** in his yard on December 2 near the Umatilla River between Pendleton and Mission.

On December 7, birding along Pendleton's River Parkway, Aaron found a flock of 30 – 35 **Bohemian Waxwings** at the SE 8th Street Bridge. By the time Duane Whitten and Connie and Russ Betts joined Aaron along the Parkway, the waxwings had flown



westerly out of sight. Duane gave chase and relocated the **Bohemian Waxwing** flock at Roy Raley Park. Aaron, Connie, and Russ walked upstream about 8 blocks along the Parkway and saw an unusual number of hawks: 1 **Prairie Falcon**, 2 **American Kestrels**, 2 **Northern Harriers**, one accipiter, a **Red-tailed Hawk**. Returning to their cars parked at SE 8th, they found a flock of 6-7 **Red Crossbills** in a yard on the north side of the river.

Tanya Harrison reported a **Mountain Chickadee** at her feeder on the North Hill in Pendleton on December 8. The bird stayed several days and joined a group of **Black-capped Chickadees** using the feeders. Black-caps are often seen in Pendleton at all seasons, but a **Mountain Chickadee** in town is a noteworthy sighting. Tanya reported **White-crowned Sparrows** using her feeders and an out-of-place male **Ring-necked Pheasant** in the neighborhood.

Aaron Skirvin and June Whitten birded in several parts of the county on December 9. They reported finding a flock of about **2000 Horned Larks** in the wheat fields at the top of Nolin Grade Road west of Pendleton. They spent 30 minutes or so sorting through the lark flock for Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs as the birds milled around but found only **Horned Larks**. Just as they were leaving the area, an adult **Golden Eagle** flew low over the area. At Cold Springs NWR, they found **3-4000 Mallards**, 3 **Canvasbacks**, **Northern Pintails**, 9 **Tundra Swans**, 4 **Killdeer**, and about 80 **Dunlins**. Along the Columbia River above McNary Dam they found several **Horned** and **Western Grebes** and, at McNary Beach Park, two **Eared Grebes**. During the course of their day, they found a total of 5 **Bald Eagles**. The following day, Aaron reported a **Merlin** hunting songbirds at the Tribal offices at Mission.

Jogging along the Parkway December 11, I saw a mature **Bald Eagle** across the river from the Little League Field. This is the same location Becky Hiers reported seeing a **Bald Eagle** in mid November. Apparently they enjoy hunting in this location.

Two **Lesser Goldfinches** made a brief appearance at my feeders on Mt. Hebron Drive in Pendleton on December 12. A rare species in Umatilla County, Lesser Goldfinches are being reported more regularly in Umatilla County this year. Perhaps they are

increasing in the area, so keep an eye out for Lesser Goldfinches at your feeders.

On December 17, Russ and Connie Betts found a large flock of **80 – 100 Cedar Waxwings** along SW 37th Street at the north end of Pendleton Community Park. This is a large flock size for Cedars, but they carefully checked the flock for Bohemians and didn't find any.

Checking out bird activity along Stage Gulch Creek in downtown Stanfield on December 18, Aaron Skirvin found one **Great Egret** fishing in the creek. Since the winter of 2004-05, one or two egrets have spent the winter in Umatilla County, and Stage Gulch Creek seems to be the most reliable place to see them. If you are driving through Stanfield this winter, take a short detour upstream and downstream along the creek from Highway 395 and look for the egrets.

The theme of observing high numbers of hawks continued on December 20 when Duane and June Whitten and Aaron Skirvin counted raptors on the Pendleton Winter Raptor Survey Route. Along the 9.5-mile stretch of Adams Road between Highway 11 (at Mt. Hebron) and Rothrock Road, they tallied 45 raptors: **22 Red-tailed Hawks**, **12 Rough-legs**, **7 Northern Harriers**, and 4 **American Kestrels**. This is a very high count, with almost five raptors per mile.

On December 22, Aaron Skirvin spotted **6 Eurasian Collared-Doves** as they foraged along Highway 207 just southwest of Hermiston near Lemmon Lane and Gettman Lane.

Keep checking your feeders for any unusual birds and remember this is a great time to be looking for birds of prey. Aaron Skirvin will be compiling the newsletter bird sightings for the December-January issue of the newsletter, so please send your sighting to Aaron for this period (umatbirder@yahoo.com) or call 276-1948. I will again be compiling the sightings starting in mid-January, 2008.

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Original art work by John Green
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