



natura

DG XI NATURE NEWSLETTER

Issue 1 • May 1996

EDITORIAL

Commissioner Bjerregaard introduces a new regular newsletter on the NATURA 2000 Network



EUROPE is founded on the respect of different identities – and it is this diversity which makes it rich. The long-standing biodiversity of our continent should similarly be respected.

Maintaining this natural heritage is an issue close to the hearts of many Europeans. And nature conservation has also been a central concern of the European Union's environment policy since the 1970s. The *Birds Directive* and the *Habitats Directive* have given us a strong legislative basis for protecting rare and endangered species and habitats. We are now facing perhaps our greatest challenge – the creation of the NATURA 2000 network. The term symbolizes the

conservation of natural resources for the year 2000 and beyond. The protection and effective management of the sites which make up this network will be vital for the continued survival of many species and habitats.

However, I also believe that NATURA 2000 gives us a great opportunity to demonstrate how environmental concerns can be integrated into other policies. Nature conservation is an integral part of land use policy, which

can be compatible with agriculture and other economic activities. It can also stimulate employment creation.

Ensuring the future of Europe's rich natural heritage needs the full participation of all the involved partners and local interest groups. Sound stewardship is not a task for European and national administrations alone. The success of the NATURA 2000 network will depend upon securing widespread support and commitment from all those who own or look after the land and from everyone who enjoys our natural heritage.

This newsletter aims to answer at least some of your questions about NATURA 2000. In each issue we will :

- explain what NATURA 2000 means in concrete terms, by analysing in-depth a particular element or process associated with the Habitats Directive and the creation of NATURA 2000;
- take a closer look at a particular site – illustrating how questions of partnership, conflict resolution and conservation planning have been addressed;
- provide a comparison of the progress of different Member States; and
- inform you about the latest events at the European Union level.

It is essential that everyone understands what the Habitats Directive means for them. This newsletter forms one important part of our overall strategy to raise public awareness of nature conservation and increase the transparency of EC activities and decision-making.



IN THIS ISSUE

- **In focus:** *Steps to the NATURA 2000 Network*
- **On site:** *LIFE project on Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft*
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IN FOCUS

The NATURA 2000 Network

The EU's nature conservation policy

The EU's policy on nature conservation within its territory is essentially made up of two pieces of legislation: Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the protection of wild birds (known as the 'Birds Directive') which was adopted in April 1979 and Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (known as the 'Habitats Directive') which was adopted in May 1992. Together, they establish a legislative framework for protecting and conserving Europe's wildlife and habitats.

At the centre of this policy is the creation of a coherent ecological network of protected areas across the EU – known as NATURA 2000. This will be made up of:

- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** to conserve the 182 bird species and sub-species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive as well as migratory birds and
- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** to conserve the 253 habitat types, 200 animal and 434 plant species listed under the Habitats Directive.

Its purpose is to maintain or restore the habitats and species at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

There are three stages leading up to the establishment of the NATURA 2000 Network from the Habitats Directive angle.

Stage 1: Preparation of the national lists

The habitats and species listed in annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive are known to be threatened on a European scale. However, the level of knowledge over their distribution and conservation status within each Member State is quite disparate. Thus, the first stage in the designation process is for the Member States to carry out a comprehensive assessment at a **national level** of each of the listed habitat types and species

which occur in their country. On the basis of this, sites which are important for their conservation are identified and submitted in the form of a national list to the Commission (legal deadline: June 95).

The choice of sites is undertaken using standard selection criteria (as specified in Annex III of the Directive). This means that the decision makers must take into account the *representativity* of a habitat type in a given site, the *area* of the site *covered* by that habitat type in relation to the national area it covers, and the *ecological quality* (including restoration possibilities) of the habitat type at the site.

Similarly for species, they should take into account the *size and density* of a population of a species in a given site compared to the national population, the *quality* of the site for the species concerned (including restoration possibilities), and the degree of *isolation* of the species on the site relative to its natural population range.

Because the NATURA 2000 network aims to conserve the habitats and species throughout their range, it is also essential that the information provided by the Member State is standardised. Thus, a NATURA 2000 Form has been created, to be filled in for each site and submitted as part of the national list. The level of detail required is significant, but this is essential not only for the completion of the NATURA 2000 network but also for any future debates over the conservation of the site in terms of other land use initiatives (e.g. location of a new road).

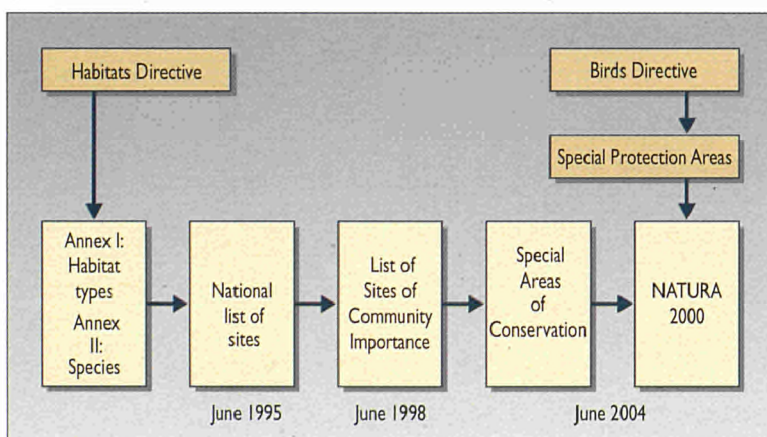
Stage 2: Sites of Community Importance

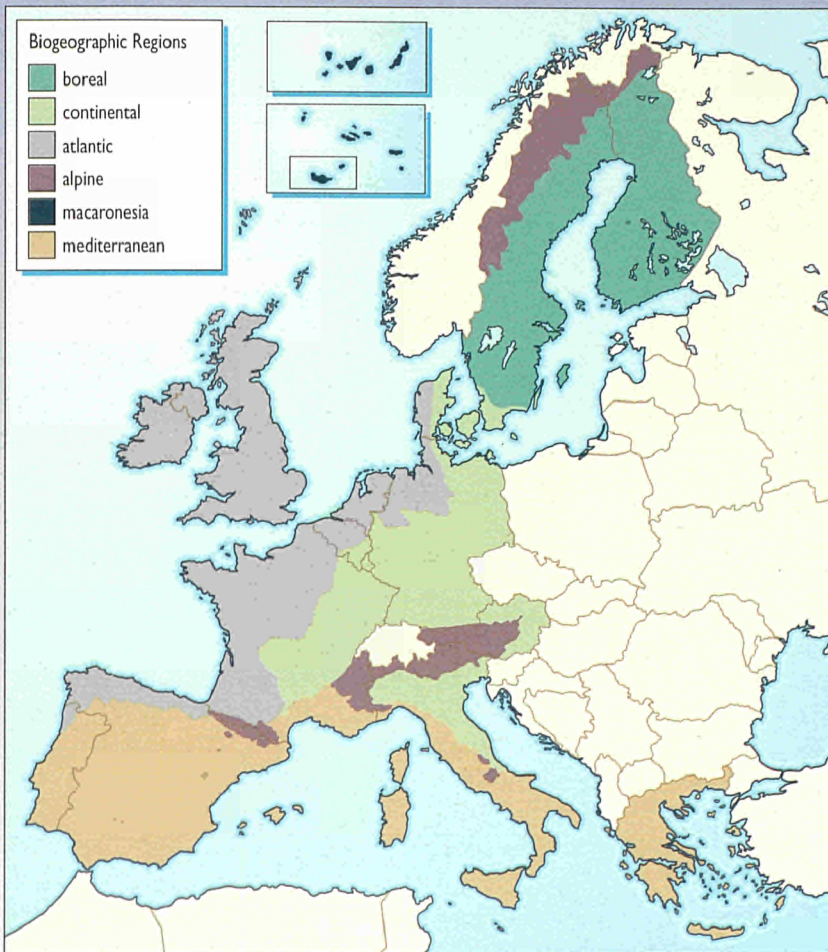
The Community covers six distinct biogeographical zones (see map). Each one of these regions has its own character and originality in terms of habitats and species, although some may be common to two or more regions. From an ecological perspective it is important therefore to look at the EU's conservation objectives in **their biogeographical context**.

Thus, the second stage of the designation process is to identify **Sites of Community Importance (SCIs)** which will make up the NATURA 2000 Network. This must be **completed by June 1998**. SCIs are sites, chosen from the national lists, which contribute significantly to:

1. the maintenance or restoration at a favourable conservation status of the listed habitat types or species;
2. the coherence of NATURA 2000 and/or
3. the maintenance of the biological diversity within the biogeographical region(s) concerned.

This selection process will be undertaken by the Commission in collaboration with the Member States according to the scientific criteria specified in Annex III of the Directive. These criteria judge the sites according to their relative *value* at national level, their *importance* as part of a migration route





Biogeographical regions of the EU Source: European Topic Centre on Nature Conservation

or as part of a transboundary site, their total *area*, the *coexistence* of listed habitat types and species and their *value* in terms of the uniqueness for the biogeographical areas or Union.

A series of biogeographical meetings is planned over the three year period to facilitate this process. The sites finally chosen for the SCI list will then be submitted by the Commission to the Habitats Committee for formal adoption.

It is worth noting that sites identified in the national lists as hosting species or habitat types considered a priority because of their imminent disappearance or extinction (denoted with an asterisk in the annex of the Directive) will automatically be selected as a Site of Community Importance (except if these 'priority' sites altogether exceed 5% of the national territory). Similarly, the Commission may in exceptional cases propose to add a site to the SCI list if it can show that, on the basis of scientific evidence, its inclusion is essential for the survival of the habitat type or species concerned.

Stage 3: Special Areas of Conservation

As soon as a site has been adopted as a SCI, Member States are required to designate it as a Special Area of Conservation within six years, i.e. at the latest by 2004. They should give priority to those that are under most threat and are of most importance in conservation terms. The six year period will be used by the Member States to

prepare management or restoration plans for the areas to ensure their favourable conservation status.

Maintaining the NATURA 2000 Network

Most of the sites making up the NATURA 2000 network should be protected by 2004. However, this does not mean that the process is finished or that the NATURA 2000 network is cast in stone once and for all. It will be essential to maintain the process as a dynamic one which can be adjusted according to the relative success or failure of the protection measures undertaken. Thus, as is the case with the Birds Directive, it is highly likely that sites will continue to be added to the NATURA 2000 Network if a species or habitat continues to decline as a result of habitat loss.

It will be the Commission's and Member States' joint responsibility to monitor the

success of the NATURA 2000 Network in terms of achieving the conservation objectives of the Directive.

Next Issue:

The next 'in focus' will look at article 6 in detail and the ruling on the A20 motorway in Germany.

DEADLINES FOR SAC DESIGNATION	
Date	Action
May '92	Council of Ministers adopt Habitats Directive
June '94	Transposition of Directive into national legislation
June '95	Submission of – national list of sites – cost estimates for conservation of sites harbouring priority habitat types and species
June '95 – June '98	Selection of Sites of Community Importance (SCI) according to biogeographical region
June '98	Adoption of list of Sites of Community Importance
June '98 – June 2004	Designation by Member States of SCIs as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
June 2004	Completion of the NATURA 2000 NETWORK containing SACs and SPAs
June 2004 onwards	Member States monitor conservation status of habitat types and species for which sites have been designated Commission reviews NATURA 2000 contribution towards achieving the conservation objectives of the Directives.

ON SITE

Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft: where land meets the sea ...



Cranes in the National Park's bog woodland where they are known to breed.

Photo: K. Thiel

CLASSIFIED IN 1992 for its strategic location along the migratory route of the crane, *Grus grus*, this Special Protection Area (SPA) is undoubtedly one of the most spectacular in Germany. It extends over 70kms of Baltic coastline, displaying an ecological treasure chest of littoral habitat types:

miles of unspoilt dunes and beaches, winding channels, broad lagoons, salt marshes, brackish-water reedbeds and seafront cliffs – 85% of the surface of this designated area is actually covered by water.

Inland, as well as on the many islands which form part of the SPA, are forests ranging from dune pinewoods to bog woodlands, mires, patches of heathland, wet meadows and scrubland. Also remarkable are the 'Windwatten'. These are vast sandflats usually submerged under a few centimetres of seawater but when the wind blows from the mainland, the seawater is pushed back off them, exposing endless expanses of bright sand which become a magnet for foraging birds.

Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft NP situated in the Land of Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Germany



The island of Bock, at the heart of this intricate maze, is the most important resting area for the cranes on their winter migration route from Scandinavia to the south to Spain and Portugal. From October to early November, about 30,000 cranes may be seen packed together on the flats around Bock. This, and its abundance of other Annex I bird species such as the marsh-harrier, curlew, ruff, little tern, osprey etc., makes the Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft a bird habitat of European significance, as reflected in its classification as SPA in 1992.

A troubled history

Human presence in this SPA's history is as fascinating as its ecological tapestry. Its 80,500 ha enclose several enclaves containing farmland, settlements and even large villages. Located mainly on the seafront, these villages have thus traditionally been holiday resorts. Tourism developed here in the first half of the 20th century; then, during the 45 years of German Democratic Republic regime, the Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft was locked into a strange schizophrenic situation. On the one hand, the old resorts were exploited as holiday camps for deserving workers and top ranking members of the secret police; on the other, vast tracts of land were fenced off with barbed wire and declared out of bounds as military security zones.

Whilst the heavy military presence in this strategic area may not have been ideal for the local community, the miles of barbed wire fences and benign neglect which resulted from it did have a positive impact on the area's natural values.

A window of opportunity

When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the local barbed wire followed. While the locals happily trespassed on lands so long denied them, the ecological movement, which had already begun organising itself in the final days of communism with an admirable sense of strategy, obtained from the democratically elected GDR government a decree designating the Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft (and many other areas in East Germany besides) a national park.

Decline of euphoria

The euphoria of 1989 soon gave way to disillusionment as the realities of a market economy began to hit home. Unemployment rocketed as one collective farm or factory after another was closed down. In this atmosphere, anything that seemed to promise jobs and income was a godsend. The protagonists of the national park, with their restrictions on free movement anywhere in the park, were accused of replacing GDR barbed wire with "green" barbed wire, while their opposition to the wilder schemes for tourism development and industrial estates made them less than popular.

Finding a way out

At this point it became clear that, if the national park was ever to become more than a "paper" entity, it needed to set up a working infrastructure on the ground: an administration, park-wardens, scientific staff, spokespeople to consult with local authorities and interest groups to seek solutions for the benefit of all. This, in turn, implied money. Although willing, the government of the newly constituted Land Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was unable to provide all the funds needed.

Thus, in 1991 and 1992, the EU's ACE and ACNAT financial instruments (the predecessors to LIFE-Nature) pitched in to the tune of 3.75 million ECU for a multi-year project. This investment has proved vital. The military debris has been cleaned up, there are trails, information centres and observation platforms for visitors, the park administration has offices and staff and there is a team of rangers. What is more, this initial pump priming has enabled the Land to take over the funding of the daily operation of the park.

However, in the long run, the central question is whether the people who live in and around the Boddenlandschaft see themselves as better off economically and socially with their SPA/national park neighbour than without it? The park management has always believed in dialogue with the local community. It has approached local fears of being fenced out of the nature reserve sensitively. For instance, it has banned intensive fishing by outsiders, but maintains the traditional low-key fishing by local fishermen. Its rangers have established working relationships with local hunters and anglers. Proposed park management plans are now being laid before fora involving all

local authorities and interest groups.

The park can already point to some impressive statistics. As of Jan. 1 1996, it employs 67 full-time permanent staff. The number of tourists who come to the park specifically to enjoy its unspoilt natural heritage has doubled from 1.6 million in 1992 to 3.1 million in 1995. An estimated 80% of the gross domestic product of the district is generated by tourism.

The park hopes that this natural capital which is driving the local economy can be preserved from the mistakes made on many other coastlines in Europe. Through its rangers, information centres, brochures and trails it is contributing to making the site attractive for visitors whilst at the same time safeguarding the park's rich natural heritage. With time it is hoped that past conflicts between the local community, outside tourists and local authorities can be overcome to the mutual benefit of all parties and even the entire Land.

For further information on the project:

- *Herrn Hartmut SPORNS, Director, Nationalparkamt Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft, Am Wald, D-18375 Born (Darß), Deutschland. Fax +49 38234 295*



Wooden boardwalk financed by the EU to channel visitors within the National Park.
































Photo H. Sporns

Wooded coastline of the National Park (Darß) illustrating natural erosion through wave action. Photo: H. Sporns






NATURA BAROMETER

(Situation as of 1/4/96 on the basis of information transmitted officially by the Member States)

Member State	Birds Directive SPA Classification			Habitats Directive SAC designation (stage I)				
	Number of SPAs	Total area (km ²)	Progress	National list	Number of sites	Total area (km ²)	Site maps	Natura 2000 forms
België/Belgique	36	4,313		0	—	—	—	—
Danmark	111	9,601			175	± 9,000		—
Deutschland	494	8,537		0	—	—	—	—
Ellas	26	1,916		0	—	—	—	—
España	149	25,338		0	—	—	—	—
France	99	7,069		0	—	—	—	—
Ireland	75	1,579		0	—	—	—	—
Italia	80	3,164			± 2,800	?	—	—
Luxembourg	6	14		0	—	—	—	—
Nederland	23	3,276		0	—	—	—	—
Österreich	n/a	n/a			94	± 3,620		
Portugal	36	3,323			30 (Madeira + Azores only)	414		
Suomi	15	n/a			370	24,726		—
Sverige	75	1,460			563	40,498		
United Kingdom	126	4,396			211	7,429		—

Note on SPAs:

Some Member States, especially Denmark and the Netherlands, have designated significant parts of their coastal waters (= non land area). Certain SPAs in Germany have been classified for nature conservation values other than their importance for birds.

- Keys:
-  classification complete
 -  complete national list
 -  available maps and forms completed and computerised
 - n/a: not available

For further information contact: Micheal O'Briain, DG XI.D.2 for SPA classification and Olivier Diana, DG XI.D.2 for SAC designation.

Commissioner proposes measures to halt further decline of the EU's Wetlands

The European Environment Commissioner, Ritt Bjerregaard, has warned that the Union must take strong action if it wishes to safeguard its wetlands. In a recent Commission Communication 'Wise use and conservation of wetlands' (Com doc (95) 189 final) she points out that more than half of Europe's wetlands have disappeared in recent years as a result of excessive urbanisation and unsound agricultural practices. She therefore wants to see coordinated action throughout the Union in order to safeguard their future. The Communication was endorsed at the Council of Ministers meeting on 4th March 1996. *Contact: Blanca Ramos DG XI.D.2.*

Integrated management programme for coastal zones proposed

Europe's coastline extends over 89,000 kms. It is important both in socio-economic terms (47% of the EU's population live within 50kms of it) and in nature conservation terms. However, much of the nature is under serious threat. Recognising the European dimension of this problem, the Commission has proposed, in its Communication in November '95 (Com doc (95) 511 final), to launch a three year demonstration programme on the integrated management of its coastal zones. This aims specifically at encouraging cross border and cross sectorial dialogue and concerted action so as to facilitate the implementation of existing legislation in this area. The proposal now goes to the European Parliament and Council for deliberation. *Contact: Michel Cornaert DG XI.D.2.*

Management of the NATURA 2000 Data base

DG XI has entrusted the management of the central data base for NATURA 2000 to the new European Topic Centre on Nature Conservation. Set up under the auspices of the European Environment Agency, this thematic centre opened in Paris last October under the direction of Mr Juan Manuel De Benito.

The Centre will only enter data into this data base that has been officially communicated by the Member States to the Commission on NATURA 2000 software as part of their national lists of sites proposed under the Habitats Directive. However, in parallel to this formal data base, the centre will also progressively develop a scientific data base which is intended to act as a reference point for nature conservation in Europe. *Contacts: Olivier Diana, DG XI.D.2 and J.M. de Benito, CTE/CN fax (33) 1 40 79 38 67.*

Adaptation of the Annexes of the Habitats Directive

Several Member States and scientific groups have expressed the wish to revise the annexes of the Habitats Directive in order to reflect more accurately the latest conservation status of certain species and habitats. Following a debate in the Habitats Committee, Member States agreed to the Commission's proposal to modify, at this stage, only within three areas: the adaptation of boreal habitats and species (Sweden and Finland), the correction of taxonomic anomalies and inconsistencies within the existing lists, and finally the tidying up of errors that may have crept in during the course of negotiation or translation.

These modifications will be discussed and agreed upon at the forthcoming Habitats Committee meetings before being submitted as an official proposal from the Commission to the Council. The Commission has already made it clear though that it will not transmit any modifications requested by a Member State who has either not transposed the Directive already or not submitted its national list. *Contact: Carlos Romao (habitats) / Oliver Schall (species) DG XI.D.2.*

Estimation of costs of implementing the Habitats Directive

A seminar, for Member State and Commission officials, was held in Valsain in Spain in December 1995 to evaluate the cost of setting up and maintaining the NATURA 2000 Network. This is required under article 8 of the Directive. It was concluded that Member States should first agree on how these costs will be calculated. To facilitate this, the Commission has contracted a consultant to analyse the various methods and come up with recommendations. These will be debated in subsequent Habitats Committee meetings. *Contact: Olivier Diana DG XI.D.2.*

NATURA 2000 logo

In accordance with Article 17 of the Habitats Directive, the Commission has proposed to develop the NATURA 2000 logo. This was adopted by the Habitats Committee at its meeting in January. It will now be used on all documents relating to the NATURA 2000 process (including this newsletter) and as a means of identifying sites that are designated Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive or Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive.



NEWS ROUND UP continued

LIFE 96 Project applications

At the time of going to press, the second phase of the LIFE Regulation (1996–1999) had not yet been formally adopted by the Council. However, a budget of 96 Million ECU has already been earmarked for LIFE for this year – with 50% intended for nature conservation. DG XI therefore issued a provisional application brochure for the submission of project proposals under nature. These should aim at contributing to the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directive. The deadline for receipt of these proposals at the Commission, via the Member States, was the 30th April 1996. A final selection will take place only after the LIFE Regulation is adopted, this is currently planned for the Habitats Committee meeting at the end of September 96. *Contact: Bertrand Delpeuch/ Angelo Salsi DG XI.D.2.*

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

Manual of interpretation of the habitats of the European Union

In order to ensure that all Member States interpret all the habitat types listed in Annex I of the Directive in the same way, a manual of interpretation was produced and agreed upon in April 1995. This has now been updated and extended to cover the additional habitat types listed as a result of the accession of three new member states and the subsequent introduction of a sixth biogeographical region. *Contact: Carlos Romao DG XI.D.2.*

Distribution of habitats and species by biogeographic region

In the last two years, the Commission and Member States organised a series of six biogeographical meetings in which the countries concerned attempted to develop a common ecological approach to the establishment of their national list of candidate SACs. One result of these meetings was the identification of the habitat types and species listed in annexes I and II according to Member State and biogeographical region. This consolidated document will now form the basis for stage II of the SAC designation procedure. *Copies available from: Blanca Ramos, DG XI.D.2.*

Status reports on fishes and invertebrates listed in the Habitats Directive

It is recognised that the scientific information available for the fishes and invertebrates listed in Annexes II and IV of the Directive is less comprehensive than for other taxa. DG XI therefore launched two studies to assess the general state of knowledge concerning the species listed in the Directive and to identify specialists in the two fields across Europe. Both reports go on to make recommendations as far as the addition, removal or reclassification of fish and invertebrate species in the annexes. These recommendations will now be considered in conjunction with other adaptations to the annexes (see above). *Contact: Oliver Schall DG XI.D.2.*

Projects funded under LIFE Nature in 1995

In 1995, the Commission co-financed – to the tune of 48.5 MECU – 49 new projects and 23 project extensions under LIFE Nature. These have been presented in a consolidated document available at DG XI. Each project is given a one page summary in its own language with a translation in French and English. The introduction explains briefly the procedures and selection criteria used and the overall results in terms of species and habitats targeted. *Contact: Bertrand Delpeuch/Sally Chapman DG XI.D.2.*



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