

Where has the summer gone? While we have had some recent seasonally warm weather, it's clear that summer is over and autumn is here.

Even though many of our favourite species hide away during the autumn and winter months, there is still lots to see, do and record, so make sure you check out the links to get involved in our *Resources Round-up*, as well as *What to look for in autumn*.

And for those of you who might be looking forward to winter already or can't wait to start feeling the holiday spirit, Wendover-based charity Lindengate will be running an Illuminated Night Walk & Nature Trail through their beautiful gardens. "Lindengate in Lights" will be held on 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> December and tickets are available on Eventbrite if you want to visit and support this local charity:

#### ⇒ Click here to learn more and book tickets

If you attended our Recorders' Seminar in the spring, you may recall Barry Webb's stunning photos of fungi, which took both first and second prize in our Photography Competition. Now, we'd like to congratulate Barry for his recent success in the <a href="New Scientist Photography Awards">New Scientist Photography Awards</a>. His photo of a woodlouse eating a slime mould not only won the Natural World category, it was also chosen as the overall winner. Congratulations Barry!

To keep up with BMERC between issues, you can find us on Twitter: <a href="MBUcksMKERC">@BUCksMKERC</a> and we also update our website with relevant news and upcoming events: <a href="www.bucksmkerc.org.uk">www.bucksmkerc.org.uk</a>

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## **BMERC General Update**

As the days get shorter and the chill sets in, we accept that summer is over and autumn has arrived – and here at BMERC, we have a lot to reflect on from the past year.

For starters, we are very proud to announce that we've surpassed the 3 million records mark in our database! The 3,000,000<sup>th</sup> record added to the database was a Brimstone butterfly (*Gonepteryx rhamni*), recorded as part of the 2019 Big Butterfly Count in Wolverton, Milton Keynes. This record was part of the large Butterfly Conservation dataset we received in late 2020.

Every record we hold is valuable, from the common butterflies to the rarest plants, so our heartfelt thanks to all of you who submit records, whether to us directly, through iRecord, or through other recording schemes.

We are also pleased to announce that customers using our online Data Searches service will now be able to request data and make a single payment for searches extending into Hertfordshire, through a reciprocal agreement between BMERC and the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC).

BMERC already has in place a similar agreement with the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre to provide the same capability for searches extending into Bedfordshire.

Over the past year, BMERC has also been involved in the production of the new Biodiversity Action Plan for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes, Forward to 2030. This strategic document sets out the main issues impacting on wildlife in the county and some of the measures needed to help our wildlife. The Executive Summary is available to download from the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership website and the full document will be available soon.

#### BMERC Recorders' Seminar—2022

Finally, please save the date for the next Annual Recorders' Seminar: Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2022.

We appreciated your feedback on our 2021 Seminar, which we held for the first time online, and we look forward to welcoming many of you to this annual event in next April. We will provide you with more details about booking and speakers in due course.



## **Taplow Court: Beyond the Trees**

Claudia Bernardini, BMERC

As part of BMERC's Ancient and Veteran Trees Project, in 2019 we contacted Taplow Court to request access to the property to survey the trees. Taplow Court has been home to SGI-UK, a lay Buddhist society, since the late eighties and it has an interesting history.

Although the main house dates back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the place was already in use during the Bronze age: "the burial mound of a Saxon lord was built on a promontory at the top of the scarp in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, giving Taplow its name: Tappa's Mound (from Anglo-Saxon Taeppa's Hloew)" (Historic England). The Anglo-Saxon burial mound is still visible nowadays in the garden.

In addition to its history, the site is also a fascinating place. The Tudor-style mansion (listed building) is mostly surrounded by formal gardens, with pasture and parkland to the south and the north of the site and woodland to the west. The location of the house on the hill offers remarkable panoramic views to the south and west side.

SGI-UK has a very holistic and sustainable approach to the natural environment, biodiversity and climate change, and strong engagement with the community.

When we approached Taplow we knew that the Woodland Trust and the Ancient Tree Forum had already surveyed the nearby Cliveden Estate, but not Taplow, just south of the estate. We were fortunate to be contacted by Phil Rollinson, Taplow's Head Gardener. Phil was so supportive and helpful from the very beginning, that the first contact quickly evolved into other surveys over the following years.

In December 2019 and January 2020, we surveyed Taplow's notable trees. In spring 2021, we surveyed the grassland and other habitats. The same summer we selected Taplow for the Noble Chafer monitoring project and a few weeks ago we supported the Bucks Fungus Group on a fungi recording day.

The tree survey revealed some outstanding specimens. The ornamental gardens to the north side of the main house welcome the visitors with two impressive Sweet Chestnuts. The ancient tree near the car park shows the typical and attractive spiralling of the bark for which the species is renowned.

Above: a Taplow Court.

meadow view at Right: one of the **Sweet Chestnut** trees on site.

North west of the manor, the Cedar Walk is an attractive avenue of very large cedars including Cedar-of-Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*), Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*) and Deodar (*Cedrus deodara*). The older trees in the Walk were probably planted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and some of these older ones, mostly Cedar-of-Lebanon, have outstanding dimensions.

The Walk is sided to the west by a steep hillside covered in deciduous woodland. Hidden amongst the dense vegetation an ancient oak shows the signs of time with a split and hollow trunk. The rot in the cavity is probably home to several species of saproxylic insects.

On the plateau north of the gardens several veteran and ancient trees can be found in the parkland and in the surrounding wooded areas, mostly Sweet Chestnut, Oak and Beech.

Overall, 25 veteran and ancient trees were recorded during our visits: Oak (*Quercus sp.*), Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) Willow (*Salix sp.*, probably *babylonica*), Apple (*Malus sp.*) Cedar (*Cedrus sp.*) and Horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*).

To the north east of the Cedar Walk there is an interesting section of parkland that BMERC also surveyed in Spring. Over a hundred plant species from grassland to woodland were identified across the site, with five species considered rare or scarce within Buckinghamshire. Taplow team is now managing the extensive areas of grassland to benefit wildlife and with carbon sequestration in mind. They have shifted from horse grazed pasture to hay meadow management and the species diversity is beginning to increase.

In late September, the BMERC team joined Penny Cullington, Derek Schafer and 16 members of the Bucks Fungus Group (BFG) in their fungi expedition. We were guided around the site by Richard Gould (gardener at Taplow), and despite the dry season nearly 50 species were identified on the day (full report and list can be found on the BFG website). The undisturbed grasslands have potential for more fungi such as waxcaps and we are hoping to investigate further this autumn: "it was certainly a



Above: Bucks Fungus Group at Taplow. Photo: Julia Carey.

privilege to explore this impressive place and we look forward to returning here in the future when hopefully fungi will be more prolific," (Penny).

## So what have we been doing at Taplow Court? Addendum by Phil Rollinson

Over the last year SGI-UK has hosted a series of monthly webinars jointly with the Centre for Applied Buddhism leading up to COP26 in Glasgow in November. The garden team at Taplow were fortunate enough to present the webinar in June titled "Thinking creatively and taking action in response to the climate emergency" in which we were able to describe our vision for creating a sustainable future for the estate. We recognise that the changing climate presents us with many challenges and opportunities in the way we manage and maintain the gardens for our members and visitors. Buddhism has always talked about the interconnectedness of all things. Our aim is to create a contemporary, innovative, exciting and beautiful garden using a holistic approach honouring the Buddhist principle of esho-funi, the oneness of self and the environment.

Claudia has outlined some of the recent (and amazing) surveys we have had done which help us understand better the ecology of the site and can inform our management decisions going forward. We have a warm, dry, exposed site, experiencing frequent drought and localised flooding and are aware of an extended growing season and new pests and diseases to contend with. We base our forward planning on the RHS report from 2017

"Gardening in a Changing Climate" which predicts three big changes towards 2050 -more extreme weather events, high variability of rainfall and average increase in temperature, all having a more dramatic effect on conditions we are already aware of. Our responses are about opportunities for gardeners to take a stand through awareness and relationship – reducing our emissions, storing carbon, providing safe havens for our wildlife and crucially contributing to our health and well-being.

We are planting a more diverse range of pollinator friendly plants with different flowering times. Our plant range is much more drought tolerant to reflect the longer, drier growing season and reducing the need for irrigation. This Mediterranean type planting will be much more resilient to our changing seasons and includes dry gravel gardening, more ground cover and self-sown seeding.

We are reducing our water use and installing water capture systems in various locations around Taplow Court and mulching beds to reduce water loss.

We recycle all our garden and kitchen waste, producing our own leaf mould compost and many tonnes of mulch – last winter alone 20 tonnes of mulch were spread over the beds in our walled garden. We recycle pallets and boxes to make planters and have experimented with growing edibles in straw bales.



Left: Phil installs a pheromone trap for Noble Chafer beetle monitoring.

We have a new garden nursery area for propagation of plants for the garden and the growing on of young trees. Here we have created 6 hugel beds. "Hugelkultur" is a centuries old eastern European method of carbon capture, mimicking natural nutrient recycling found in a woodland floor. Mounds are created by initially digging long trenches which are filled with woody material and then covered with plant waste, turf and compost. They are excellent at retaining moisture, building soil fertility, provide a big surface area for growing and are great for recycling logs and branches which may otherwise have to be burnt.

We have planted many new ornamental trees in the formal garden areas over the last 10 years. Now we have started a tree planting programme over the wider estate, predominantly native species with the aim of planting over a thousand trees in the next four years as gaps appear in the woodland cover. We recognise the benefit of having ancient trees to our biodiversity and retaining dead and decaying trees in the landscape. With the prospect of no beech thriving in southern England by 2050 we are adapting our species mix to suit.

We are reducing, reusing and recycling wherever possible in the gardens. Our aim is to reduce the impact of garden machinery and fuel use particularly by reducing the areas of close mown turf to mainly just around the mansion house and formal garden areas. Wherever we can we have let grass revert to spring or summer meadow.

Our wildflower meadow areas, whether annual or perennial are a great success. The fields to the north of the house exhibit characteristics of lowland and chalk grassland which are hugely important habitats for the conservation of biological diversity in England (there are estimated to be less than 6000 hectares remaining in the UK). Over the last four years, through careful management of these 40 hectares we have seen an increase in native wildflower species and a dramatic increase in insect activity and diversity. This has involved the introduction of yellow rattle, sainfoin and control of ragwort. We are hoping to implement the same management to the fields to the south of the house, currently grazed by horses and not accessible to visitors.

We are aware of the threat of new and increasing pest and disease problems, however, using integrated pest control methods we are aiming to be fully organic in the near future – resources permitting!

Our future vision is to be the change we want to see – we have begun a critical decade in our response to the climate emergency and we feel it's important to stay positive and rise to the challenge. Horticulture is very different now to when I started my career nearly forty years ago but it is still a really exciting and rewarding life!

For anyone interested in visiting, Taplow Court is hoping to re-open to the public in 2022. You can find out more about the webinar series on the website: <a href="mailto:sgi-uk.org/Climate-Change">sgi-uk.org/Climate-Change</a>



Above: Pyramidal Orchid in one of Taplow's meadows.



Can you identify these species found in Bucks and/or Milton Keynes? Answers will be in the next issue!







How did you do with the Dansersend special last issue? Thank you again to Mick Jones for supplying the photos:









Robin's Pincushion gall on rose



Above: Wild Clematis seedhead

Thank you again to Mick Jones for supplying these photos from Dancersend Nature Reserve.

## Introducing the new LWS Surveyor

Matt Sharp, BMERC

Hi, I am Matt the new Local Wildlife Sites Surveyor. I joined the BMERC team in August from the City of London where I worked as an Assistant Ranger at Burnham Beeches NNR and Stoke Common SSSI.

It has been a great first couple of months thanks to the rest of the BMERC team who have all helped me to settle into my new role. They have made sure that I knew where to go, what to do and that my laptop was working as it should be. I have already visited several Local Wildlife Sites and met some of the excellent site managers. Now I'm in the process of brushing up my survey skills and learning my way around the computer-based mapping systems.

I am very happy to have been able to take up this opportunity to join the BMERC team. I have had a lifelong interest in wildlife, especially in birds, and regularly submit records using the Birdtrack and iRecord apps. I have taken part in the breeding bird survey for the last 6 years and in my previous role was involved in a variety of vegetation monitoring and habitat condition assessments. I also helped to add records to a Recorder database to be shared with BMERC.

Since studying Applied Ecology at the University of Gloucestershire I have been lucky enough to work on some top nature reserves, such as Chobham Common and Burnham Beeches where I was mostly involved in planning and carrying out practical works on heathland, woodland and wood pasture habitats.

Wood pasture is a mosaic of grassland, scrub and trees with a diverse and dynamic vegetation structure, which is ideally maintained by extensive mixed grazing. It is one of the most biodiverse habitats in the UK and is thought to closely resemble European ecosystems before they were significantly influenced by human activity.

The wood pasture restoration project at Burnham Beeches was one of the most exciting and interesting projects that I have been involved in so far. It involves selectively thinning the secondary woodland that has developed in some areas following a period without management. Secondary



woodland can act as a barrier to some invertebrates, they struggle to disperse through it because it is colder and damper than the surroundings. Removing some of the trees kick-starts natural regeneration processes. It lets in more light which allows ground layer vegetation to colonise. This vegetation will gradually develop into wood pasture under the influence of grazing by cattle and ponies, and occasional habitat management work by the rangers. The aim of the project is to reconnect patches of established wood pasture to enable invertebrates to travel and disperse through the site. Their populations will hopefully be more resilient to localised threats as a result.

In the next few months, I will be working with Fiona to identify some potential local wildlife sites to survey next spring, looking through the BMERC database to see if they hold any interesting records and seeking permission to survey from landowners. I am very much looking forward to meeting a few more of the Local Wildlife Site managers and visiting more of the lovely calcareous grasslands.



Holly scrub in wood pasture habitat at Burnham Beeches.



## **Creating Wilder Road Verges**

## Rhiannon Flemming, Bucks & Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership

Wildflower habitats have declined substantially across the UK since the 1930s, which has a significant impact on insects and other wildlife. Our urban and rural road verges can provide vital wildflower habitat without compromising safety for road users.

Wildflowers provide a vital source of nectar for butterflies, bees and other pollinating insects. Both the flowers and the insects provide a food source for birds and other wildlife. Insects and animals can also find shelter in the long grass.

Changing the management of local green space has numerous benefits, not just for wildlife but also for the community. Plant growth can absorb stormwater, decrease erosion, and trap carbon: all excellent benefits for our planet and our community.

For many road users, road verges are their main (or even only!) exposure to nature on a daily basis and road verges in the UK have great potential to be managed safely, sustainably, and positively for wildlife. More than 132,000 people have signed Plantlife's petition for Wild Road Verges, which demonstrates how perceptions are changing.

In response to increasing requests about road verges, the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership (NEP) has developed a toolkit to help parishes and local communities get started with managing their road verges for wildlife.

With a focus on lowering soil fertility and removing cuttings, the toolkit aims to provide easy to understand guidance alongside links to more detailed resources. It also highlights local case studies, as well as case studies from across the UK.

You can download the Wilder Road Verges Toolkit from the NEP website: <a href="mailto:bucksmknep.co.uk/wilder/">bucksmknep.co.uk/wilder/</a>

While this toolkit focuses on road verges, the principles it advocates of low fertility and cut-and-collect can be applied to any area of grassland.

The toolkit has been developed as part of the Wilder Road Verges pilot project, which is in partnership with the NEP, Buckinghamshire Council, BMERC, Butterfly Conservation, the Chilterns Conservation Board, and Transport for Buckinghamshire.



As we descend into the season of mellow fruitfulness and dig out the woollies and wellies, what can we look forward to after a very mixed summer?

The flowering plants are on their last legs now so time to shift our attention to other groups, particularly the fungi. Hopefully recent rainfall has been enough to give them a boost, so keep eyes peeled for the emergence of this varied and fascinating group. Consider joining the very active Bucks Fungus Group who run an extensive programme of walks during the fungi season and have lots of really useful resources and information on their website.

Although most of our more obvious invertebrates have disappeared now the colder weather has arrived, if we are blessed with a warm sunny day it is well worth keeping an eye out for foraging insects. You may still catch sight of an Ivy bee (*Colletes hederae*) in late October, and you can submit those records to the BWARS mapping project.

Try and resist the urge to have a good old tidy-up in the garden this autumn, wildlife prefers a bit of 'mess'! Hollow plant stems and seedheads can provide nooks and crannies for insects and the seedheads are a welcome source of oil-rich food for birds and small mammals. If you gather your leaves, pop them into a sheltered corner or under a hedge to provide a nice little duvet for a hedgehog. Keep an eye out for hedgehogs in your garden, who will be





searching for food before they go into hibernation. Tiggywinkles has a handy <u>Hedgehog Fact Sheet</u> with plenty of advice for helping this beloved mammal.

Leaving a stack of plant pots (preferably the lovely clay ones) in a sheltered spot will provide a nice cool, dry place for bees and other insects to overwinter. Some butterflies overwinter as adults and will enter our homes in autumn, where they find conditions cool and dry. However, when the central heating is turned on they wake up and expend energy flying around. You can relocate them into a shed or garage where the temperature will remain more constant—just remember to let them out again in the spring!

Spiders are another common sight in autumn; this is the time of year when male spiders start their search for a mate. You're most likely to see two common species in the UK: the House Spiders (*Tegenaria sp.*) and Garden Spider (*Araneus diadematus*). Spiders are a very under-recorded species, so when you do spot one, make sure you record it! There's more information on the <u>Spider & Harvestman Recording Scheme website</u>.

You may spot a basking reptile in warm, sheltered areas and we would really like your records so don't forget to submit them, either directly to <a href="MERC">BMERC</a> or via <a href="MERC">iRecord</a>.

Above: Ivy bee (*Colletes hederae*), photo: Neil Fletcher. Left: Fiona provides a veritable buffet for her hedgehog guests, but dog food or meaty cat food and a shallow dish of fresh water will suffice.



Autumn is a wonderful time for funding fungi, and colourful waxcaps are some of the brightest and easiest to spot.

The UK is home to some of the most important waxcap grasslands in the world, but these are becoming increasingly uncommon, as waxcaps dislike disruption and prefer old, undisturbed land. As a result, waxcaps are an excellent indicator of rare, species-rich grassland.

Therefore, Plantlife are asking sightings of waxcaps via Waxcap Watch. Participation is as simple as downloading the app, visiting a site (be it field, park, road verge, pasture, cemetery—in fact, any grassy area that is publicly accessible) and recording the colours of the waxcap fungi you see.

If you fancy talking a walk among some waxcaps, visit the <u>Plantlife website</u> for more information.



Above: Waxcaps at Great Brickhill Church.

You can also check out the <u>Autumn 2020</u> issue of the BMERC newsletter for a very informative article on Ancient Acid Grasslands by Tony Marshall.

## **Asian Hornet sighting in Berkshire**

Defra has asked beekeepers and members of the public to remain vigilant after an Asian hornet was spotted in the Ascot area of Berkshire.

The National Bee Unit has confirmed the sighting and monitoring is underway to detect any other Asian hornets in the vicinity.

The Asian hornet is smaller than our native hornet and poses no greater risk to human health than our native wasps and hornets. However, they do pose a risk to honey bees and work is underway to monitor for any hornet activity and to identify any nests nearby.

It is important to take care not to approach or disturb a nest. Asian hornets are not generally aggressive towards people but an exception to this is when they perceive a threat to their nest.

If you suspect you have seen an Asian hornet you should report this using the iPhone and Android app 'Asian Hornet Watch', by using <a href="mailto:the online report">the online report</a> <a href="mailto:the online report">form</a>, or by email: <a href="mailto:alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk">alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk</a>

Identification guides and more information are available and if you keep bees you should keep up to date with the latest situation on the gov.uk sightings page and on BeeBase.



#### What have we been up to?

When she wasn't studying road verges, Rhiannon spent the tail end of summer foraging for blackberries, plums, and Aylesbury Prunes.



Neil has been enjoying autumn fungi with the Bucks Fungus Group. Group forays are led by county recorders Penny Cullington and Derek Schafer. The peak fungi



season is late this year, so there are still lots of opportunities to find interesting things, such as Oak Mazegill (*Daedalea quercina*), pictured.

For part of the summer Claudia worked from Italy, where the heat was such to require the switch from coffee to ice cream. The last couple of months have been spent mostly gathering the data from the reptile and amphibian surveys and the pond project. The tree reports are almost all completed, time to plan the next phase of the project!





Fiona has followed Rhiannon's lead but is now heartily sick of plums and wishes they would just all fall off the trees! She is also formulating plans to stowaway in Claudia's luggage next summer...



It seems we have all a bit of a forager in us: Julia is also suffering from a surfeit of foraged plums, apples and berries... Julia has also been supporting work in Bucks and surrounding counties to promote Junipers' welfare and regeneration, hunted for elusive beetles, looked for little pink flowers amongst a sea of goose poo and held the end of various tape measures to locate key species and assess ancient trees.

Matt has been learning his way around the county, and the inside of County Hall. He is also getting the hang of Poland and Clement's Vegetative Key to the British Flora thanks to a very useful Field Studies Council course.



## **Resources Round-Up**

This is a round up of all of the links in this issue, plus ways to get involved and items of general interest:

#### **Lindengate in Lights**

www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/lindengate-in-lights-tickets-166178054033

New Scientist Photography Competition Winner www.newscientist.com/article/2292217-sublime-slime-mould-wins-new-scientist-photography-competition/

Forward to 2030: Biodiversity Action Plan bucksmknep.co.uk/forward-to-2030/

**Taplow Court Webinars** <u>sgi-uk.org/Climate-Change</u>

Bucks & MK NEP: Wilder Road Verges Toolkit bucksmknep.co.uk/wilder

Bucks Fungus Group www.bucksfungusgroup.org.uk

BWARS: Colletes Heredae Mapping Project www.bwars.com/content/colletes-hederae-mapping -project

Tiggywinkles' Hedgehog Fact Sheet www.sttiggywinkles.org.uk/hedgehog-fact-sheet/

# Spiders & Harvestman Recording Scheme srs.britishspiders.org.uk

#### Plantlife Waxcap Watch

www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/habitats/grassland/waxcaps-fungi/waxcapp-survey

#### **Asian Hornet Information**

<u>www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts/index.cfm?id=4</u> <u>www.gov.uk/government/publications/asian-hornet</u> <u>-uk-sightings</u>

FSC Biolinks Online Courses & Events www.field-studies-council.org/biolinks-courses

Mammal Society Survey: Are Britain's Wild Animals Eating Plastics?

<u>www.mammal.org.uk/science-research/are-britains</u> -wild-animals-eating-plastics/

Caring for God's Acre: Free Webinars, topics include Ancient Tree Inventory (10<sup>th</sup> November) and Bats in Churches (1<sup>st</sup> December)
<a href="https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/attend-a-session/webinars/">www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/attend-a-session/webinars/</a>

**Chilterns Walking Festival** (until 31<sup>st</sup> October) www.visitchilterns.co.uk/walkingfest.html



## **Our Final Thoughts**

Whether you are curled up under a cosy blanket with a warm drink, or outside enjoying a bracing breeze or autumnal drizzle, we hope you enjoyed this issue of our newsletter.

Our colleagues in the Environment Team are recruiting Ecology Officers as well as Biodiversity Net Gain Officers, in order to meet the needs of the forthcoming Environment Bill. If you or anyone you know might be interested in these roles please

spread the word! For more information, visit: <a href="jobs.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/job">jobs.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/job</a> detail/226779/

If you have any feedback or would like to write an article for a future issue, we would love to hear from you. Our contact information is below.

Best wishes from the BMERC Team, Claudia, Fiona, Julia, Matt, Neil & Rhiannon



#### **Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre**

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