

PSO Newsletter



The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

July 1998

Volume 9, Number 2

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK....

I must admit to showing a great deal of nervousness as I stood in front of the 100 or so people who were in the audience for the Saturday night banquet at our 1998 annual meeting. It fell to me to introduce Ralph Bell, our 1998 Earl Poole Award recipient. My job that night was to give a short speech outlining some of Ralph's past accomplishments, and present the award plaque and a gift book to him. I showed less nervousness, as I recall, when, as a new captain in the active duty Air Force 18 years ago, I went before a bunch of colonels and one or two generals to brief them on a long-forgotten project for which I had been given sole responsibility.

I first met Ralph only the day before when a friend and I helped get him settled into his room at the Mansfield University dormitory. It was clear from that first meeting that Ralph is a special person. He's the epitome of today's citizen scientist. Only in Ralph's case, he's been in the field getting his boots muddy for decades while collecting bird data and doing conservation work.

In sitting with Ralph before the dinner, I went over my little speech with him to make sure I had all the facts of his field ornithology work straight and accurate. We reviewed his bird banding history (more than 100,000 banded); his work with bluebirds (hundreds of nest boxes monitored in some years); his memberships in various ornithological and birding organizations (AOU, AFO, WOS, etc.); his research into cowbird

parasitism; and his years of service to the Brooks Bird Club. I knew that no matter what I said, a two-minute speech could never adequately convey this man's contributions to field ornithology and conservation.

Ralph's family also attended the dinner. It was a warm experience to meet and talk with his daughter, Joan Pattison, and her husband. Above all else, though, it was a pleasure to meet this gentleman who has done so much for ornithology in Pennsylvania and neighboring West Virginia.

Our 1998 meeting was a success--across the board. The field trips introduced many of us to some key areas and important bird habitats, particularly The Muck and the high elevation forest of Colton's Point above Pine Creek Gorge, and the final trip list reflects the rich bird diversity of these habitats. These natural areas also serve to illustrate the fact that north central Pennsylvania has some extremely important bird areas. Our challenge is to make sure they maintain the ecological integrity we witnessed on our field trips.

All of the Saturday presentations were well received, from Ted Floyd's discussion about Christmas Bird Count data to Jeff Groth's presentation on crossbills. Having read through Jeff's "crossbill" site on the Internet just a few months before, I was particularly anxious to hear his talk. The continued presence into late May of crossbills in our state, by the way, is reason enough to visit the nearest stand of conifers.

Perhaps the most important reason we hold these annual gatherings is that they give us a chance to renew old friendships and make new ones. It was heartening for me, for example, to run into two fellow "wild earthlings," writer Marcia Bonta and her husband, Bruce. We talked about the just completed round of public meetings the state Bureau of Forestry conducted on its district management plans and briefly shared our mutual delight in being fellow subscribers of "Wild Earth."

The PSO membership owes a generous thank you to the many people who had key roles in staging our 1998 meeting. These annual gatherings are organized and run entirely by volunteers--folks who donate many hours to ensure that the indoor sessions, the field trips, the banquet and the many logistical details go off without a hitch.

On my recent jaunts around the Luzerne County town where I live, I'm reminded again and again of why we need a strong PSO and a strong conservation community in Pennsylvania. For while Bobolinks and meadowlarks are now holding down territories in hay fields where they went unrecorded in years past, the encouragement these birds send my way with their songs and courtship flights is diminished by the realization that just across the valley another oak-hickory forest has fallen before the bulldozers of "progress."

The developer calls it "Meadows II," but it's hardly the "meadows" it was only four months ago. While there is little actual population growth in Luzerne County, the habitat-destroying goliath known as "suburban sprawl" continues to spread across the countryside in this and other counties of our state. The "sprawl" wrecks quality bird habitat as it leapfrogs the valley onto the surrounding ridges where formerly unbroken forests are now increasingly fragmented by roads and what a fellow conservationist derisively calls "starter palaces."

Birders and other folks who appreciate the native wildlife of this land need to become more involved in their local governments. We need to stand up, for example, at planning and zoning board meetings and speak out on behalf of the

wildlife of our state. We need to take this message as well to our county commissioners, and the folks who wear business suits around the state Capitol. We also need to join like-minded people and like-minded organizations in spreading the conservation message.

The passing in Monroe County on May 12--by a 52 percent majority--of a \$25 million bond issue to finance the preservation there of wildlife habitat and open space gives us momentum to take the conservation message into other counties. Let's get to work!

Look for news about the meeting site for our 1999 meeting in this newsletter this fall. In the meantime, your officers and directors invite your comments and suggestions. Finally, please join me in thanking Bob Ross, our president for the 1996-98 term, for his outstanding leadership.

--Alan C. Gregory, President

The Conservation Corner

Two important issues that directly impact birds and birding are currently being discussed in Congress. The first is the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the issue is that Congress has raided \$11 billion from this fund over the past several years to help balance the budget. These funds were to be used to purchase critical habitat for wildlife, parks, and forests. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

Presently efforts are being made to revitalize the LWCF and as much as \$867 million may be made available for land and water conservation projects this year. However, Congress must include these funds in the budget or we will go another year without critical resources for parks and open space projects.

ACTION NEEDED - PSO members are urged to contact both US Senators and their Congressman and urge them to support funding for the LWCF. A sample letter follows on the next page.

The Honorable _____
US Senate OR US House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20510(Senate) 20515 (House)

Dear Senator/Congressman:

I would like to thank you for making open space and outdoor recreation a high priority for the 105th Congress. Restoring the funds rightfully belonging in the Land and Water Conservation Fund is a positive step and will show that Congress truly supports conservation.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund was created in 1965 to preserve, develop, and assure that all Americans have access to quality outdoor recreation to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States. This non-regulatory program, which receives dedicated funds from federal off-shore oil and gas revenues, is responsible for the creation of parks, trails, playgrounds, wildlife refuges, and greenways throughout the country including many projects in Pennsylvania.

I strongly urge you to ensure that Congress delivers the full appropriation this year so that critical conservation projects can continue to move forward.

Sincerely,

The second issue is once again the Endangered Species Act (ESA). For a brief time, it appeared that nothing would happen in this session of Congress regarding the reauthorization of the Act. However, recently, certain anti-ESA Senators have renewed their efforts to have Senate bill 1180 passed. This bill does not adequately protect endangered species for several reasons including the following: it does not allow flexibility to adjust land management plans in order to address unforeseen species declines; does not provide for citizen input in key species protection decisions; and does not provide a reliable and secure funding mechanism for endangered species programs.

There is an alternative bill in the House of Representatives that does correct the Senate bill's shortcomings. That bill is H.R. 2351.

ACTION NEEDED - PSO members are again asked to contact both US Senators and urge them to not support S.1180 but instead, show support for H.R. 2351. Their address is listed above.

Please take the time to contact the Senators and your Congressman. The anti-environmental groups are very vocal on these issues and our elected officials need to hear from us. Endangered and threatened birds as well as their habitat need our support.

--Mark Henry
Conservation Chairperson

PSO Annual Meeting Workshops

by Rudy Keller

The speakers at this year's workshops continued the tradition of presenting an excellent mix of interesting topics. Three of them directly addressed the conference theme, birds of PA's northern tier counties.

Tim O'Connell of Penn State presented a project that assessed forest cover and quality for forest interior birds in the mid-Atlantic highlands using GIS technology and manual assessment of random blocks. Blocks were ranked from highest quality (complex, mature closed canopy forest) to lowest (largely deforested farm or urban land). The heavily forested northern tier stacked up very favorably, with most blocks in the higher categories, none in the lowest, and a high occurrence of forest interior species.

Brad Ross, working for National Audubon Society and Penn State, focused on the response of birds to timbering on private, non-industrial forest land in northeastern PA. Individual holdings are small (80 down to 8-10 H and getting smaller as land is subdivided), but taken together these little studied holdings add up to 75% of all forest land. In both northern hardwood and oak

communities, clearcutting or heavy harvesting increased numbers and species of birds, especially when seed trees and snags were left. Lighter harvesting favored forest interior birds including neotropical migrants like Cerulean Warbler, currently of much concern to birders and scientists. Fewer than 15% of these forests are regenerating adequately, largely due to deer browsing and fern competition. Ross reported that landowners were interested in wildlife in their woods but were more interested in economic returns. Sounds like a great opportunity for education.

PSO's Doug Gross kept everyone's attention with his list of special breeding birds found by SAP participants in northern PA, especially in his beloved remote swamps and bogs. What birder wouldn't enjoy a morning with nesting Red-shouldered Hawks, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, Nashville Warblers, N. Waterthrushes, and White-throated Sparrows, not to mention the related plant communities? Doug and Bob showed us some of these the next morning at Great Possessions.

Ron Rohrbaugh from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology gave an introduction to the lab's citizen science projects that enlist the help of birders in research. Rohrbaugh urged PA birders to join in the lab's Cerulean Warbler Atlas Project, which is trying to map more accurately the breeding range and density of this special concern species.

Ted Floyd, who compiles Christmas Bird Count and North American Migration Count data for *Pennsylvania Birds*, described a method for analyzing CBC data that lessens the influence of the main sources of bias. These are observer bias (more of them with greater skill than in earlier years) and weather, with the latter affecting the former (greater observer effort in good weather). If counts of two given species are equally susceptible to bias, the effect is neutralized and their numbers can be compared. Thus, Ted demonstrated that CBC data show a decreasing ratio of Am. Tree Sparrows to Dark-eyed Juncos statewide. Similarly, dividing out Sharp-shinned Hawks by Cooper's shows a decline of Sharpies to Coops.

After last winter's historic crossbill irruption into PA, no speaker was more eagerly anticipated than Jeff Groth of the American Museum of Natural History. His work on Red Crossbill calls is changing the taxonomy of the species. As a graduate student at Virginia Tech, Groth made recordings and sonagrams of about two dozen captive Red Crossbills and discovered that each bird has an individual signature call. Using his technique to study subspecies, he discovered (after 1000 hours and 1200 captures) two clusters of very similar calls that matched two behaviorally and morphologically distinct southern Appalachian forms which he called Type 1 and (the larger) Type 2. He found that pairs matched exactly in flight calls, with no mixed call pairs, and that the two types did not interbreed. Widening his focus to include all of North America, he ultimately recorded 7 distinctive call types. Whether Groth's "Types" are subspecies or species (since apparently they do not interbreed) is being debated. Genetically, there is no difference.

Based on recordings made by birders and sent to Groth, Red Crossbills at Cook Forest last winter fell into Types 1, 3, and 4, mostly in discreet flocks. A highlight of the talk was Groth's playing of recordings at various speeds of various call types as he projected the sonagrams. He conceded that it would take a birder many hours of listening and comparing, preferably with recording equipment, to be able to distinguish any call types reliably. With its forays into recording technology, statistics, species concepts and genetics, this talk could have been a jargon-laden eye-glazer. Instead it was a model of how a good speaker can present complex information to an informed lay audience with wit and color.



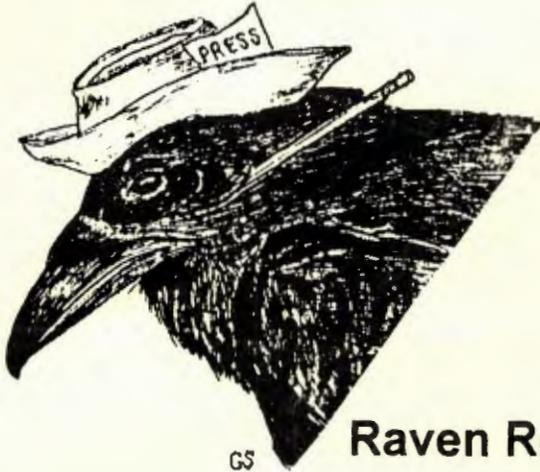
PSO Meeting Bird List

May 16-18, 1997

| | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Common Loon | Ring-billed Gull | Winter Wren | Black-and-white Warbler |
| Pied-billed Grebe | Rock Dove | Marsh Wren | American Redstart |
| Double-crstd Cormorant | Mourning Dove | Blue-gray Gnatcatcher | Ovenbird |
| Am. Bittern | Chimney Swift | Eastern Bluebird | Northern Waterthrush |
| Great Blue Heron | Ruby-thrtd. Hummingbird | Veery | Louisiana Waterthrush |
| Little Blue Heron | Belted Kingfisher | Gray-cheeked Thrush | Common Yellowthroat |
| Green Heron | Red-bellied Woodpecker | Swainson's Thrush | Hooded Warbler |
| Canada Goose | Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | Hermit Thrush | Canada Warbler |
| Wood Duck | Downy Woodpecker | Wood Thrush | Yellow-breasted Chat |
| Mallard | Hairy Woodpecker | American Robin | Scarlet Tanager |
| Am. Wigeon | Northern Flicker | Gray Catbird | Northern Cardinal |
| Common Merganser | Pileated Woodpecker | Northern Mockingbird | Rose-brsted. Grosbeak |
| Turkey Vulture | Eastern Wood-Pewee | Brown Thrasher | Indigo Bunting |
| Osprey | Alder Flycatcher | Cedar Waxwing | Eastern Towhee |
| Red-shouldered Hawk | Least Flycatcher | European Starling | Chipping Sparrow |
| Broad-winged Hawk | Eastern Phoebe | Solitary Vireo | Field Sparrow |
| Red-tailed Hawk | Great Crested Flycatcher | Yellow-throated Vireo | Savannah Sparrow |
| American Kestrel | Eastern Kingbird | Warbling Vireo | Song Sparrow |
| Ring-necked Pheasant | Purple Martin | Red-eyed Vireo | Swamp Sparrow |
| Ruffed Grouse | Tree Swallow | Blue-winged Warbler | White-throated Sparrow |
| Wild Turkey | N. Rough-wng. Swallow | Tennessee Warbler | White-crowned Sparrow |
| Virginia Rail | Cliff Swallow | Nashville Warbler | Dark-eyed Junco |
| Sora | Barn Swallow | Yellow Warbler | Bobolink |
| Common Moorhen | Blue Jay | Chestnut-sided Warbler | Red-winged Blackbird |
| American Coot | American Crow | Magnolia Warbler | Eastern Meadowlark |
| Semipalmated Plover | Common Raven | Black-thr. Blue Warbler | Common Grackle |
| Killdeer | Black-capped Chickadee | Yellow-rumped Warbler | Brown-headed Cowbird |
| Lesser Yellowlegs | Tufted Titmouse | Black-thr. Green Warbler | Orchard Oriole |
| Solitary Sandpiper | Red-breasted Nuthatch | Blackburnian Warbler | Baltimore Oriole |
| Spotted Sandpiper | White-breasted Nuthatch | Yellow-throated Warbler | Purple Finch |
| Semipalmated Sandp. | Brown Creeper | Pine Warbler | House Finch |
| Least Sandpiper | House Wren | Blackpoll Warbler | Am. Goldfinch |
| | | | House Sparrow |

1997 PSO Meeting Participants

| | | | | |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Dick Allyn | Dick Byers | Barb Haas | Arlene Koch | Joan Bell Pattison |
| Jon Beam | Robert Cook | Frank Haas | Gloria Lamer | Peter Robinson |
| Ralph Bell | Ruth Cook | Becca Harmon | Doreen Laubscher | Victoria Robinson |
| Anna Bert | Gary Crossley | Elaine Harmon | Wayne Laubscher | Robert Ross |
| Dennis Bert | Jane Earle | Paul Hess | Bruce Launius | John Salvetti |
| Gloria Bickel | Wes Egli | Margaret Higbee | Michael Leahy | Glenna Schwalbe |
| Matthew Bickel | John Fedak | Roger Higbee | Mark McConaughy | Paul Schwalbe |
| Nick Bolgiano | Ted Floyd | Deuane Hoffman | Carol McCullough | Fred Stiner |
| Marcia Bonta | Alan Gregory | Shonah Hunter | Fred McCullough | Georgette Syster |
| Bruce Bonta | Doug Gross | Dorothy Jacobs | Florence McGuire | Ann Vayansky |
| Dan Brauning | Jeff Groth | Rudy Keller | Jim McGuire | Tom Will |
| Margaret Buckwalter | Carol Guba | Margaret Kenepp | Donald Pattison | Ronald Young |



Raven Reporter

News of the Special Areas Project

Summer Adventures in Pennsylvania

Tired of the same old same old? Why not roam around the Keystone State and study the birds at a remote state park or natural area that you have never before visited. Just keep your notes and send them in to us as a SAP Daily Survey Form. Some birders do this with some regularity. It adds to the sense of adventure and to PSO's database on the birds of the state. Do you think birding stops each spring with the fading notes of the final Blackpoll Warbler trill? Well, it doesn't. Some of the most exciting and challenging Pennsylvania birding just begins. Breeding birds, that is. In just one good June or July morning, a good birder can find most of the common breeding birds of a state park or natural area. A car full of birders can do it easily. So, get out of your rut and find some good birds this summer. Adventure awaits you.

Natural Areas: the Great Pennsylvania Winter Finch Frontier

The incredible finch and nuthatch invasion has stimulated many birders to search the state's Natural Areas for "the winter finches." They have had great success. The great mecca for crossbills has been Cook Forest State Park, a SAP coordinated by Margaret Buckwalter. I have seen some reports on the internet and wonder how much of this data will reach the Special Areas Project. Even a few field trips from each location would be a great help to our project. We have received data from a few locations, but would appreciate any additional field trip reports from those who have not yet contributed. For starters,

here are some Natural Areas for which we wish we had more bird data (local coordinators in parentheses):

- Alan Seeger NA (Greg Grove)
- Algerine Swamp NA (Doug Gross)
- Bark Cabin NA (need coordinator)
- Bear Meadows NA (Scott Walker and State College birders?)
- Bruce Lake NA (need coordinator)
- Colonel Denning NA (Grace Randolph)
- Detweiler's Run NA (Greg Grove)
- Frank Masland NA (Grace Randolph)
- The Hemlocks NA (Grace Randolph)
- Mount Davis NA (John Tilley)
- Pine Creek Gorge NA (Brenda Janeski)
- Quebec Run NA (need coordinator)
- Reynolds Spring NA (Doug Gross)
- Snyder-Middleswarth NA (need coordinator)
- Sweet Root NA (need coordinator)
- Tall Timbers NA (need coordinator)
- Tamarack Swamp NA (need coordinator)

We could also use more data from some of the large, wild state parks, state forests, and remote game lands that have extensive forests or conifer growth, a partial wish list:

- Black Moshannon SP (need coordinator)
- Game Lands 38 (Doug Gross/Alan Gregory)
- Game Lands 110 (need coordinator)
- Game Lands 127 (need coordinator)
- Game Lands 211 (Grace Randolph)
- Gouldsboro SP (need coordinator)
- Hickory Run SP (Bernie Morris)
- Lackawanna SF (Rick Koval)
- Laurel Hill SP (need coordinator)
- Leonard Harrison SP (need coordinator)
- Linn Run SP (need coordinator)
- Lehigh Gorge SP (need coordinator)
- Michaux SF (need coordinator)
- Nockamixon SP (need coordinator)
- Ohiopyle SP (Alan Clarke)
- Oil Creek SP (need coordinator)
- Ole Bull SP (Dave Hauber)
- Promised Land SP (Rosann Bongey)
- Raccoon Creek State Park (need coordinator)

- Ricketts Glen SP (Doug Gross/Skip Conant)
- Tuscarora SF (need coordinator)

Please help them out by sending SAP data to them or directly to SAP Central (address given below). If you need addresses or phone numbers, please let me know. The Special Areas Project provides an avenue between birders and various state agencies. After SAP gets the data and inputs it into the SAP database, it can be sent to people who work in the Bureau of State Parks, Bureau of Forestry, the Game Commission, or conservation associations. SAP receives requests for bird information because it represents the PSO and offers good quality, edited bird data for *specific locations*.

Poconos: Yooohoooo?!?!? Helloooooo?!?!? Anybody there?

While perusing the internet bird reports on our great finch invasion, I have noticed a huge bird data void: the Poconos. Are there any birders out there? Is anybody looking for crossbills or other northern type birds in "one of the world's Last Great Places." The Poconos are a prime area for finding northern rarities and conifer specialists. It has many spruce, tamarack, and balsam fir swamps. It has pine barrens conveniently placed near turnpikes. The birds are surely there. But, where are the birders? Pennsylvania birders should wake up and fill this gaping hole in Pennsylvania ornithology. This region has great potential for making new discoveries. Are there Blackpoll Warblers or Bicknell's Thrushes nesting in the Pocono Northeast? How about Bay-breasted Warblers? Common Loons? Olive-sided Flycatchers? Yellow-bellied Flycatchers? Crossbills or Evening Grosbeaks? The potential is there, especially this year. Thanks to birders like Rosann Bongey, Mary Kay Coleman, Alan Gregory, and members of the Lackawanna Audubon Society for the SAP data on the few Poconos locations surveyed by birders. If you have any inclination to do some summer birding in one of the state's most un-birded places, please let me know of your interest.

Cook Forest State Park: the Magical Forest

Hundreds of birders have flocked to Cook Forest to witness the extraordinary crossbill invasion. With jaws agape and bated breath, people have felt overwhelmed by the spectacle of swirling flocks of crossbills. Cook Forest is a Special Areas Project. It is an Important Bird Area. It is one of the biggest and best examples of old growth forest in northeastern United States. It is truly a magical place. Now, perhaps, birders will better understand the benefits of old growth conifers to birds. A few hundred crossbills have shown us why. Thanks to Margaret Buckwalter for coordinating bird data for this park. Mike Leahy has been especially helpful to the crossbill watch.

Red-breasted Nuthatches and Other Northern Specialties Sometimes "Hang On" to Nest

In addition to the finch flocks, Red-breasted Nuthatches also staged a major invasion. They were seen in bigger numbers in more places than just about any year. Red-breasteds eat pine, hemlock, and spruce seeds, among other things. This includes the scrawny little Virginia or scrub pines, Scots pine, pitch pine, and mountain pines. The little "yankers" will "hang on" through spring and nest where the food is sufficient to sustain the dietary needs of a nuthatch family. This might be the best year to add Red-breasted Nuthatch to the breeding list of many locations, even at lower elevations and southern locations. Keep an ear and eye out for the little devils near you.

The list of possible northern breeders does not end there, of course. With so many birds flying so far south this last winter, some might breed far south of their normal nesting grounds. Birders should be alert to Pine Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks, and crossbills lingering in their areas. Some of these might breed. Follow the birds from their foraging areas to see if they are flying to a nest full of young. Evening Grosbeaks have been found nesting in backyards where a caterpillar infestation and bird feeders provided ample nutrition. They don't necessarily need a deep forest or bog to feel at home. Keep your eyes and your mind open to new possibilities.

New Blue SAP Seasonal Report Forms Are Completed

New birder friendly SAP Seasonal Forms have been revamped for use in 1998 and beyond. After listening to some complaints and noticing patterns of input errors, we decided to make some critical changes to the form that we hope everyone will like. Some changes should minimize data input errors and maximize ease of use. With shading and fonts, the new forms make species easier to find. Lines will be easier to follow across the page. PORC species will be highlighted in italics (the species requiring extra documentation). The new PA Species of Special Concern will be marked with asterisks. The new AOU names have already been incorporated in our draft form, but we are waiting for the newest AOU Checklist before changing the species and family order. Those changes will come at some future time in some future form. The reporting periods will be changed to match those of *Pennsylvania Birds* seasonal reports. This will make it easier for SAP Coordinators to use SAP reports for *PA Birds* county reports. Everyone benefits. For those who would like to stick to the traditional seasonal reporting schedule (Dec-Feb, Mar-May, June-Aug, Sep-Nov), feel free to do so. We are flexible on the reporting period here at SAP Central.

Please Send In Delinquent SAP Data

We would appreciate any SAP data that you have been sequestering in files at home. Don't let it rot and collect dust. Don't let the dog chew it up or let it get soaked by a rainstorm blowing in an open window. Send in what you can as soon as you can. We appreciate the data. SAP is especially looking for data collected in state parks and natural areas. We anticipate getting more bird data from the northern tier counties that were highlighted at the May PSO meeting.

SAP Central: Douglas A. Gross, Ecology III
R. R. 1, Box 1795
Berwick, PA 18603

phone: (717) 542-2191
e-mail: dougross@sunlink.net



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