THREE COUNTRIES TOUR 2- ZAMBIA-BOTSWANA-NAMIBIA

PARTICIPANTS

Roger Bird, John Brooks, Graham Crick, Ian and Sally Hunter, Jim Law, Val Thompson.


Tour organiser John van der Dol, Sandwich Bird Tours.

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OCTOBER 25TH

The second group arrived at about the same time as the first group left Livingstone airport. They were on time and the group consisted of six weary travellers.

We collected the luggage and immediately set off for the waterfront to book tomorrow’s boat trip and have a cold drink. We then visited Victoria Falls which unfortunately is lacking most of its water at the moment although on the Zimbabwe side there appeared to be plenty resulting in a huge spray cloud. In a way this was best as it meant we were not going to be soaked to the skin.

A few interesting birds were noted including Trumpeter Hornbill, loads of Red-winged Starlings and some of the common species which we will be seeing daily.

We then left for Maramba River Lodge, rather inappropriately named at the moment as the river is dry. We checked into our luxury tents and after a rest we set off for a patch of Miombo forest not far from the lodge where we found a Bat Hawk on the nest a few days ago with the other group. Both birds were present again and more photos were taken. A herd of Buffalo were found in the forest and our first Dark Chanting Goshawk was noted.

We returned to the lodge for a shower and an early dinner and night despite being disturbed by some extremely noisy German motorcyclist campers.

OCTOBER 26th

An early morning walk before breakfast resulted in the usual suspects but also a Retz’s Helmetshrike, a Collared Palm Thrush and a brief view of a Red-faced Cisticola.

We set off at 06.10 to the waterfront where we were told about a pair of Trogons in the most unlikely of habitats by a so-called “expert” from another group. They turned out to be Black-collared Barbets. So much for experts!

Our boat trip up and down the mighty Zambesi was very successful with three male Finfoots being the highlights. Great views and more photos. Six were seen at two locations last tour. Other interesting birds were loads of Water Thick-knees, two Rock Pratincoles, some Skimmers, and the usual herons including Goliath, Green-backed etc. Giant and Malachite Kingfishers were fun and lots of Blacksmith and White-crowned Lapwings gave good views too messing around along the river banks.

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A good trip again. We returned to the lodge for a late breakfast. After about an hour we left for the sewage ponds where the best birds were Collared Pratincoles of which two were seen, a Baillon’s Crake gave stunning close views, a pair of Painted Snipe were hard to find and a Whiskered Tern did the rounds of the ponds. Two or three Black-breasted Snake Eagles put in an appearance too.

We moved on to Taita Lodge to have another attempt at the falcon after which the lodge was named. May be they had them there once as after about seven hours in two days we still have not seen one. However we had a nice lunch and added Greater Striped Swallow and African Black Swift to the list.

The return journey again added the Dark Chanting Goshawk and the two Bat Hawks as well as Green-winged Pytilia and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, but the find of the day was a Klaas’ Cuckoo which was the first of the year for our guide.

OCTOBER 27TH

After an early start where Graham and I had stunning views and photos of a Red-chested Cuckoo we met up with the group and added White-browed Robin-Chats, Red-faced Cisticola, Martial Eagle and a few other bits and pieces to the list. We had breakfast and packed up and left Zambia for Botswana. The border crossing and ferry took a while and it was very not, but interesting nevertheless. By mid day we were in our second country of the tour. It took just half an hour to get to Chobe Safari Lodge.
We had lunch on the terrace overlooking the Chobe River while a Long-billed Crombec picked about above our heads. White-eyes were much in evidence and Willow Warblers reminded us of home. Dark-capped Bulbuls fizzed about in the fruiting fig tree and the odd Yellow-bellied Greenbull was noted.

A brief siesta and we were off to the local sewage works (yet another one) which as last week was well frequented by Marabou Storks. An African Harrier Hawk was found drinking at the edge of the pool and Marsh Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilts, Ruff, Common and Wood Sandpipers made up the wader numbers. An Elephant was present taking advantage of the green grass at the edge of the pond while the ducks were represented by Red-billed and the White-faced varieties.

Orange-winged Pytilia was a nice find and Magpie Shrikes and Green Wood Hoopoes were seen too as were a couple of Yellow-throated Petronias. On the way back we had an Impala with a couple of Yellow-billed Oxpeckers in attendance. The real birding starts tomorrow.

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OCTOBER 28TH

A 6am start round the lodge grounds produced good views of an African Marsh Harrier and a few of the normal garden species such as Terrestrial Brownbul, a small party of Bronze Manakins, White-bellied Sunbird, Spectacled Weaver etc.

After breakfast we did a boat safari on the River Chobe between Namibia and Botswana. The three hour ride produced some wonderful sightings such as two Hippos having a dual, food passing between adult and immature Fish Eagles, Elephants crossing the river and then having mud and dust baths. White-fronted, Southern Carmine, Little and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were noted and many egrets and herons included the rare Slaty Egret and a couple of Goliath Herons. Long-toed Lapwings gave great views too.

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We arrived back in time for lunch after which another boat safari was taken.

Huge Crocodiles provided some entertainment by just lying on the banks while Red Lechwe and Puku, both specialities of this area, were seen at close range.

The afternoon boat trip had many highlights, not least of which were excellent views of a Half-collared Kingfisher just a few hundred metres from the lodge. Perhaps the most spectacular sightings were the Elephants which came down to drink this late afternoon. Probably 200 or more were seen. We had Skimmers down to just a few feet.

Hippos were in abundance and a group of female Greater Kudus came down to drink too. Great views of Fish Eagles again. Ruff appeared to be present in good numbers and possibly still on migration as they were not really seen in these numbers a few days ago.

A fantastic meal again tonight and as usual we retired early to bed in anticipation of a new location tomorrow. The meals in this lodge are probably as good as you can get anywhere. The variety and quality was just amazing.

OCTOBER 29TH

A pre-breakfast round of the lodge gardens produced a pair of Red-necked Falcons. The female is much bigger than the male.

We left after breakfast and drove yet another of these very straight roads. The South Africans who built these roads must have had instructions from the ancient Romans. At the Botswana-Namibia border post we found a pair of African Barred Owlets, one of which gave excellent views and allowed close approach for photography.

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The highlights of this morning’s drive were a party of beautiful Sable and three Southern Ground Hornbills. We arrived at Caprivi House boat Lodge just before lunch. A rather rustic place with superb food and Scalow’s Turaco in the grounds.

Following a siesta during the heat of the day we went for another boat trip. It really only took us down a small tributary of the main river and once in sight of the latter we turned round back towards the lodge. It was a bit disappointing really and the guide did little other than drive the boat. However we did see another Finfoot, found by Val, and a Little Sparrowhawk which was good value.

The sunset was beautiful and allowed some nice photos of the orange sky.

A lovely meal was followed by another good night’s sleep in our curious little cottages with bathrooms open to the elements.

OCTOBER 30TH

Early morning walk before breakfast produced the Turaco again, this time close enough to get some half-decent photos. 2 White-backed Night Herons were roosting in the trees overhanging the river right by the dining room, and an array of Sunbirds including Purple-collared were noted.

We had a nice breakfast after which we left for the long drive back into Botswana and Drotsky’s Lodge. This is a huge lodge with an amazing timber structured roof. Birds en route included Bradfield’s Hornbill and Dark Chanting Goshawk.

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From here, after a cup of tea, we were transferred by boat to Xaro’s lodge which is run by Donovan, the son of the owners of Drotsky’s.

There was a Black Cuckoo in the grounds of the lodge and a Brown-throated Weaver visited the bird table.

The boat transfer to Xaro’s was, as last week, very interesting with Fish Eagles commonly seen and heard, Skimmers and Bee-eaters breeding, and Pearl breasted Swallow and Brown-throated Martins feeding over the river.

We checked in quickly and already Neil had us out for a walk which was actually a pleasant change from sitting in a bus. Two Pel’s Fishing Owls, Greater Honeyguide, Brown Firefinches, Barred Owlet, Common Waxbills, Thick-billed Weaver and Golden-tailed and Cardinal Woodpeckers were seen. A Bushbuck made a brief appearance.

After dinner we went out with a torch and found the pair of Wood Owls close to the lodge. They had been calling and actually continued to do so for much of the night.

OCTOBER 31ST

Most people were out before breakfast. The lodge’s grounds are very good for birds and Meyer’s Parrots, Burchell’s Starling, Grey Tit Flycatcher were seen amongst the more common species.

After breakfast we did another very brief walk to try and get better views of the owls and so it was that eventually the Pel’s sat out in the open to allow some good photos by some. The Wood Owl was relocated and yesterday’s Clawless Otter was seen well and photographed.

On the way back to Drotsky’s we had an extended boat cruise looking for Greater Swamp Warbler and Little Rush Warbler. The latter was heard only and we had views of the former, albeit somewhat brief. This area is just so diverse in its species that one could spend a month here and never get bored.

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However it was time to leave and make for our next accommodation, namely Mahunga’s Lodge, this time in the western Caprivi Region of NE Namibia. At least there were now no more border crossings.

We arrived just before lunch and to have toasted sandwiches on the banks of the river is indeed very special. Birds come to you here and Meves’s Starlings were forever present. Yellow-bellied Greenbuls and the Black-headed Bulbuls eating out of the sugar bowls and attacking the butter was fun if not particularly hygienic.

We settled into our tents and had a wander round the gardens. The usual White-browed Robin-Chats, Brown Firefinches, Grosbeak Weavers and Black Crakes were present and photographed by some.

Late afternoon was the time for our daily boat trip on the Okavango River (with sun downer). A tour round the sandpit in the river produced some Collared Pratincoles, Skimmers, some of the usual waders and a surprise Lesser Jacana, right out in the open. The usual kingfishers and bee-eaters were present and we floated up to a White-fronted Bee-eater colony in the sandy river bank. Nice to get within feet of these beauties.

As the sun dropped in the sky, the water turned a bright orange making a group of Hippos look quite romantic, if that is possible with a group of snorting two ton beasts.

We returned just before dark and had our showers before yet another lovely al fresco meal on the deck by the river. The only downer being some rather noisy smoking Germans, but the less said about that the better.

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NOVEMBER 1ST

An early morning walk produced a few Sunbirds but otherwise it was a little quiet. After a sumptuous breakfast we set off for the Mahangu National Park which is a great place for birds and in particular the Wattled Crane, an Okavango speciality, of which five were seen. A pair of Ostrich with young were noted and mammals including Elephants, Sable, Roan, Reed Buck and Red Lechwe. The afternoon safari produced much the same.

Other birds of interest included Long-toed Lapwings, our only Steppe Eagle and Black Kite of the tour, and Bennet’s and Bearded Woodpeckers were really nice. New larks included Rufous-naped and our only Fawn-coloured Lark.

NOVEMBER 2nd

After some early morning birding and yet another great breakfast with loads of yogurt we left for the Kaisosi River lodge. This really is just a stop-over accommodation but situated on the, now named Kavango River, is nevertheless a good place for birds. En route three Lanners, two disputed Peregrines which will remain unidentified, and several Bateleurs were recorded.

After lunch we visited the local sewage ponds where the usual waders were seen. They included Little Stints, Ruff, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, Greenshanks, Three-banded Plover. Two Pied Cuckoos landed in the trees besides the bus allowing decent views and some bad photos. A Turnstone, whilst common to us, was a rarity at this site.

Whilst here, the wind got up very quickly and this was followed by a heavy rain storm which curtailed activities. However Osprey, a pale-phase Booted Eagle and a Eurasian Hobby were seen.

We returned to the lodge and had a lovely dinner, after which Barn Owls were seen in the grounds.

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**NOVEMBER 3**

Again after some early morning’s birding we set off for Uris Safari Lodge. Another brief visit to the sewage ponds produced nothing new and we were on our way. It is a long way to the next accommodation so we stopped at Boys Camp for lunch. They were the best toasted sandwiches of the whole tour using salami rather than ham. The main reason for stopping here were the Black-faced Babblers which were seen before we even got out of the bus. Some tours spend hours looking for them but we were extremely lucky to get great views immediately on our arrival.

This is the most bizarre lodge one could wish to visit being mostly made and decorated with metal junk. More like a scrap yard, but very interesting nevertheless.

After our lunch we said our goodbyes and set off for Uris, stopping on the way at an old open-cast copper mine dug may be 200 years ago. Here two Barn Owls were flushed but the target was the Spotted Eagle Owl which was duly found and seen well by the whole group.

We found a large mixed feeding flock including some Bare-cheeked Babblers, a speciality of this place. A Buffy Pipit on the roadside too gave good views.

We continued on to the lodge and settled into our cottages before a welcome drink and dinner in this bizarrely decorated Moroccan style lodge. Freddie, our gay African waiter, was a jolly soul and made us all very welcome.

**November 4-6**

Early morning birding round the lodge produced nothing much of interest so we decided to pack up, have breakfast and leave Uris for Etosha and Halali Lodge which was going to be our home for the next three nights. This is a government lodge and although not as luxurious as some of the others, it certainly is a good location for a few days.

We entered the park in the late morning and drove on to Namutoni Lodge for lunch. They have a waterhole there and some Painted Snipe gave great views but not much else was present. The rest of the afternoon was taken up by the safari of the eastern section of Etosha and the start of some amazing game. We saw a pair of Lions right by the road and a Black Rhino. Some waterholes produced loads of Giraffes.

Most days we did three safaris, before and after breakfast and again in the late afternoon.

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During our stay here we had a pride of Lions with 5 cubs, numerous encounters with Elephants, some Spotted Hyenas, more Black Rhino, the Black-faced sub-species of Impala, numerous Burchell’s Zebra and Wildebeest, Gemsbok, Greater Kudu, Red Hartebeest etc.

It is an incredible place not only for its game but for its birds too. Kori Bustard were common in the grasslands and Secretarybirds were found at a nest site. Tawny Eagles were widespread as were Black-winged Kites and Greater and Rock Kestrel were present too.

It is difficult to describe the experiences we had, but there were many, mostly involving mammals coming to waterholes. So plenty of action and interaction of the predator species and the prey. Clearly Lions and Elephants don’t like each other but tolerate each other just as in India and big herds of Zebra often mixed with Wildebeest and loosely associated Springbok are very wary of Lions.

At Rietfontein waterhole we found the Lion family of 5 females with 5 cubs, possibly no more than two or three weeks old. We watched them for some time and watched as a herd of Zebra was stopped in its tracks as they could smell the felines. The lions looked interested but judging from their behaviour they were unlikely to be any danger to the stripy jobs.

A little later a great herd of mixed Zebras and Wildebeest were followed to a waterhole where a spectacular session was experienced. At one stage the whole flock was spooked and they all turned and ran off creating much splashing of water. Good actions shots were taken. After this they were very nervous indeed and did many more about turns for no apparent reason.

On the way back our first Fiscal Shrike was found and a male Red-backed Shrike had made it here all the way from somewhere in Europe. Quite a feat for all these migrant species.

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Two morning safaris resulted in a couple of Black Rhinos, the family of lions again, this time with the father present and a superb Marshall Eagle at the same waterhole. Kori Bustards were again noted in good numbers and White-quilled and Red-crested Bustards were also seen.

One morning after breakfast the security guard found us the pair of White-faced Scops Owls which we had been unable to locate yesterday. Other owls in the camp were African Scops and Barn Owl. Our owl list now stood at 8 species.

NOVEMBER 7th

A slow drive through the central part of the park and out through the Andersson Gate via Okaukuejo. The latter has a most amazing waterhole that appears to be full of mammals at all times. Here too large flocks of Namaqua Sandgrouse come to drink during the day which in itself is quite a spectacle. All the mammals are really close so great views are possible.

From here we had a long drive to the Waterberg Plateau and the Bernabe de la Bat Resort. We settled into our chalets fairly quickly so we could do the walk up the hill in search of Rockrunner which we duly found a number of. This is a speciality of the area. Damara Did Diks were feeding amongst the chalets and close approach was possible. Unfortunately we did not really have long enough here to see all the birds possible but some of the group found a Short-toed Rockthrush.

We had a nice dinner here before getting an early night as we had to pack and get off early the next morning to connect with our flight back to Johannesburg and on to London.

NOVEMBER 8th

Drove to Windhoek and the airport. Our flight was delayed by 3 hours which turned out to be a good thing making another three hour wait at Joburgh less arduous than the scheduled six hours would have been.

This has been a really successful tour of an amazing country with stunning wildlife. Safariwise did an excellent job throughout and Neil was a great guide and fun to travel with.

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The accommodations were excellent and food tremendous and so I have no hesitation in recommending Safarwise to any potential traveller to Namibia and beyond.

**Systematic list**

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<th>Common Ostrich</th>
<th>Glossy Ibis</th>
<th>Steppe Eagle</th>
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Greater Kestrel
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Red-billed Spurfowl
Swainson’s Spurfowl
Helmeted Guineafowl
Wattled Crane
Black Crake
Baillon’s Crake
Purple Gallinule
Common Moorhen
Red-knobbed Coot
African Finfoot
Kori Bustard
Red-crested Bustard
White-quilled Bustard
African Jacana
Lesser Jacana
Greater Painted Snipe
Common Ringed Plover
Kittlitz’s Plover
Chestnut-banded Plover
Three-banded Plover
Crowned Lapwing
Blacksmith Lapwing
White-crowned Lapwing
African Wattled Lapwing
Long-toed Lapwing
Common Sandpiper
Green Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Marsh Sandpiper
Greenshank
Redshank
Curlew Sandpiper
Turnstone
Little Stint
Ruff
Black-winged Stilt
Spotted Thick-knee
Water Thick-knee
Double-banded Courser
Collared Pratincole
Rock Pratincole
Grey-hooded Gull
Whiskered Tern
African Skimmer
Namaqua Sandgrouse
Double-banded Sandgrouse
Feral Pigeon
Red-eyed Dove
Mourning Collared Dove
Ring-necked Dove
Laughing Dove
Namaqua Dove

Green-spotted Dove
Meyer’s Parrot
Ruppell’s Parrot
Schalow’s Turaco
Grey-go-away-Bird
African Cuckoo
Red-chested Cuckoo
Black Cuckoo
Great Spotted Cuckoo
Pied Cuckoo
Klaas’s Cuckoo
Coppery-tailed Coucal
White-browed Coucal
Barn Owl
Wood Owl
African Scops Owl
White-faced Owl
Pearl-spotted Owlet
Barred Owlet
Spotted Eagle Owl
Pel’s Fishing Owl
Fiery-necked Nightjar (heard)
Rufous-cheeked Nightjar
Eurasian Swift
Black Swift
Bradfield’s Swift
White-rumped Swift
Little Swift
Palm Swift

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Red-faced Mousebird
Pied Kingfisher
Giant Kingfisher
Half-collared Kingfisher
Malachite Kingfisher
Woodland Kingfisher
Rown-hooded Kingfisher
Grey-hooded Kingfisher
Eurasian Bee-eater
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
Southern Carmine Bee-eater
White-fronted Bee-eater
Little Bee-eater
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater
Lilac-breasted Roller
Rufous-crowned Roller
Broad-billed Roller
African Hoopoe
Red-billed Woodhoopoe
Violet Woodhoopoe
Common Scimitarbill
Trumpeter hornbill
Grey Hornbill
Red-billed Hornbill
Damara Hornbill
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill
Bradfield’s Hornbill
Monteiro’s Hornbill
Southern Ground Hornbill
Black-collared Barbet
Pied Barbet
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird
Crested Barbet
Greater Honeyguide
Lesser Honeyguide
Bennett’s Woodpecker
Golden-tailed Woodpecker
Cardinal Woodpecker
Bearded Woodpecker
Rufous-naped Lark
Fawn-coloured Lark
Sabota Lark
Spike-heeled Lark
Red-capped Lark
Pink-billed Lark
Stark’s Lark
Grey-backed Sparrowlark
Eurasian Swallow
Wire-tailed Swallow
Pearl-breasted Swallow
Rufous-chested Swallow
Mosque Swallow
Greater Striped Swallow
Lesser Striped Swallow
Grey-rumped Swallow
Rock Martin
House Martin
Plain Martin
Banded Martin
Fork-tailed Drongo
Eurasian Golden Oriole
Black-headed Oriole
Black Crow
Pied Crow
Southern Black Tit
Arrow-marked babbler
Black-faced Babbler
Hartlaub’s Babbler
Pied Babbler
Bare-cheeked Babbler
African Red-eyed Bulbul
Black-capped Bulbul
Terrestrial Brownbul
Yellow-bellied greenbul
Groundscraper Thrush
Short-toed Rockthrush
Capped Wheatear
Familiar Chat

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<td>Marico Sunbird</td>
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<td>Amethyst Sunbird</td>
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<td>African Yellow White-eye</td>
<td>House Sparrow</td>
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<td>Great Sparrow</td>
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<td>Yellow-throated Petronia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scaly Weaver</td>
<td>Red-billed Buffalo Weaver</td>
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<td>Red-billed Sparrow-weaver</td>
<td>White-browed Sparrow-weaver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grosbeak Weaver</td>
<td>Sociable Weaver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spectacled Weaver</td>
<td>Village Weaver</td>
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<td>Masked Weaver</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<td>Common Waxbill</td>
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<td>Jameson’s Firefinch</td>
<td>Shaft-tailed Whydah</td>
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</table>

**MAMMALS**

- African Buffalo
- Bushbuck
- Greater Kudu
- Southern reedbuck
- Waterbuck
- Red Lechwe
- Puku
- Roan Antelope
- Sable Antelope
- Gemsbok
- Blue Wildebeest
- Red Hartebeest
- Topi (Tsessebe)
- Impala
- (Black-faced Impala)
- Burchell’s Zebra
- Black Rhinoceros
- Rock Hyrax
- Elephant

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