



IMPACT REPORT 2026

Empowering Women. Inspiring Conservation. Creating Change.

Uganda Women Birders Club

13 years of training women to lead in birding,
guiding and conservation, 2013–2026

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About This Report

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Acknowledgements

This report tells the story of Uganda Women Birders Club from 2013 to 2026. It was made possible by our members, who shared their journeys, and by the partners who have walked with us.

We thank Bird Uganda Safaris for hosting and supporting the club since its founding, the Uganda Wildlife Authority and the Uganda Tourism Board for early equipment and training, and every partner listed on the final page.

Contents

A Message from the Founder	3	Key Results	11
Executive Summary	4	Our Impact	12
Who We Are & Our Approach	5	Voices of UWBC	15
What We Do	7	Global Visibility	18
Our Journey, 2013–2026	8	Leadership and Governance	20
The Barriers We Address	10	Lessons & Looking Ahead	21

A Message from the Founder

Dear Members, Partners and Friends,

In 2006, at the American Birding Convention, I met women who were leading birding as guides, researchers and business owners. Later, a passionate woman guided me in Illinois. I came home with one question: why were there so few women doing this work in Uganda, a country so rich in birds?

The answer was not talent. It was access. Binoculars were costly, field guides were scarce, families doubted that guiding was a career for a woman, and a young trainee had few women to learn from. In May 2013, about 15 young women joined me on a birding excursion near Akright Estates. That day, Uganda Women Birders Club was born.

Thirteen years later, more than 80 women have trained with us, and about 70% are employed or running their own businesses. Our members lead international tours, assess Uganda's tourist guides, research the endangered Shoebill, run lodges at Kibale and mentor the next generation. In 2023 we hosted the first International Conference for Women Birders, and our model has taken root in Kenya and Rwanda.

These results belong to the women themselves: the founding team who carried the club through its early years, the experienced members who gave their time to coach and support trainees, and the coordinators who now bring the club closer to women in every region. They also belong to partners who believed early, from the Uganda Wildlife Authority's first 15 binoculars to everyone who stands with us today.

We have also learned hard lessons. Training alone is not enough. Women leave when childcare, marriage pressures or the cost of gaining experience become too heavy. Our next chapter must pair training with equipment, mentorship and real markets.

My vision is to see Ugandan women recognised as global leaders in birding and conservation, through a women-run safari company, an East African Federation for Women Birders, and opportunities that reach rural communities near our protected areas. I invite you to walk this next stretch of the journey with us.



Herbert Byaruhanga

Founder, Uganda Women Birders Club
Managing Director, Bird Uganda Safaris

Executive Summary

13 years, 80+ women trained, ~70% in work or business

Since 2013, the Uganda Women Birders Club (UWBC) has worked to increase women’s participation in bird watching, nature guiding and conservation in Uganda. The club has passed through two leadership generations: the founding team (2013–2021) and the decentralised, six-region structure (2022 to date). Membership kept growing through changes in tourism conditions, leadership and geography.

The club has grown from about 15 women on its first excursion to more than 80 trained women. About 70% are now formally employed or running their own businesses.

Over 13 years, UWBC has built a network of six regional coordinators and hosted IC4WB 2023, the first International Conference for Women Birders, which drew more than 300 delegates.

The model has crossed borders, inspiring the Kenya Women Birders Association and the Rwanda Women Birders Club.

UWBC RECORDS CHANGE IN FOUR AREAS



Professional growth and employment



Entrepreneurship



Research and conservation leadership



Community and youth engagement

UWBC advances Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Uganda’s national tourism and conservation priorities.

Who We Are

A registered, non-political, non-religious local not-for-profit, founded in May 2013 to open birding and nature guiding to women and girls in Uganda.

OUR VISION

To have equal access to opportunities and produce the best nature women guides in the world.

OUR MISSION

To build the capacity of women in nature guiding, especially birding and conservation, and to be trusted tourism ambassadors for Uganda.

OUR VALUES

- ◆ Conservation of the environment
- ◆ Creativity
- ◆ Equality
- ◆ Hard work

OUR OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Grow the number of professional women guides
- ◆ Turn women into job creators, not job seekers
- ◆ Make members Uganda's tourism ambassadors
- ◆ Build financial independence
- ◆ Pass conservation values to the next generation



UWBC members on a birding field trip

"Training a woman means training a nation"

UWBC MOTTO

Our Approach

Tourism in Uganda has long been led by men. UWBC uses birding as the entry point to bring women into the sector as guides, entrepreneurs and conservationists.

01

Learn in the Field

Members learn bird identification, calls and guiding on real excursions, at sites like Mpanga Forest, Mabamba and the national parks. Experienced members coach and support new trainees.

02

Mentor, Then Lead

After training, members are mentored into jobs and businesses. Leadership roles rotate, so members gain governance experience alongside their careers.



What We Do

Seven activities turn interest in birds into careers, businesses and conservation action.

Training

Birding and nature-guiding courses that build professional skills and expertise.

Field Practicals

Short birding trips to master bird identification, habits, habitats and conservation.

Empowerment Events

Conferences, webinars, workshops, Big Birding Days, expos and business mentorship.

Sponsorships

Support for members to travel to birding events, locally and internationally.

Tours

Members are skilled enough to lead birding tours across East Africa.

Community Campaigns

Talks in schools, colleges and villages near birding sites on birds and conservation.

Research

Bird population monitoring and birdlife research; several members now lead studies.

Seven activities, one pathway: from interest in birds to careers, businesses and conservation.



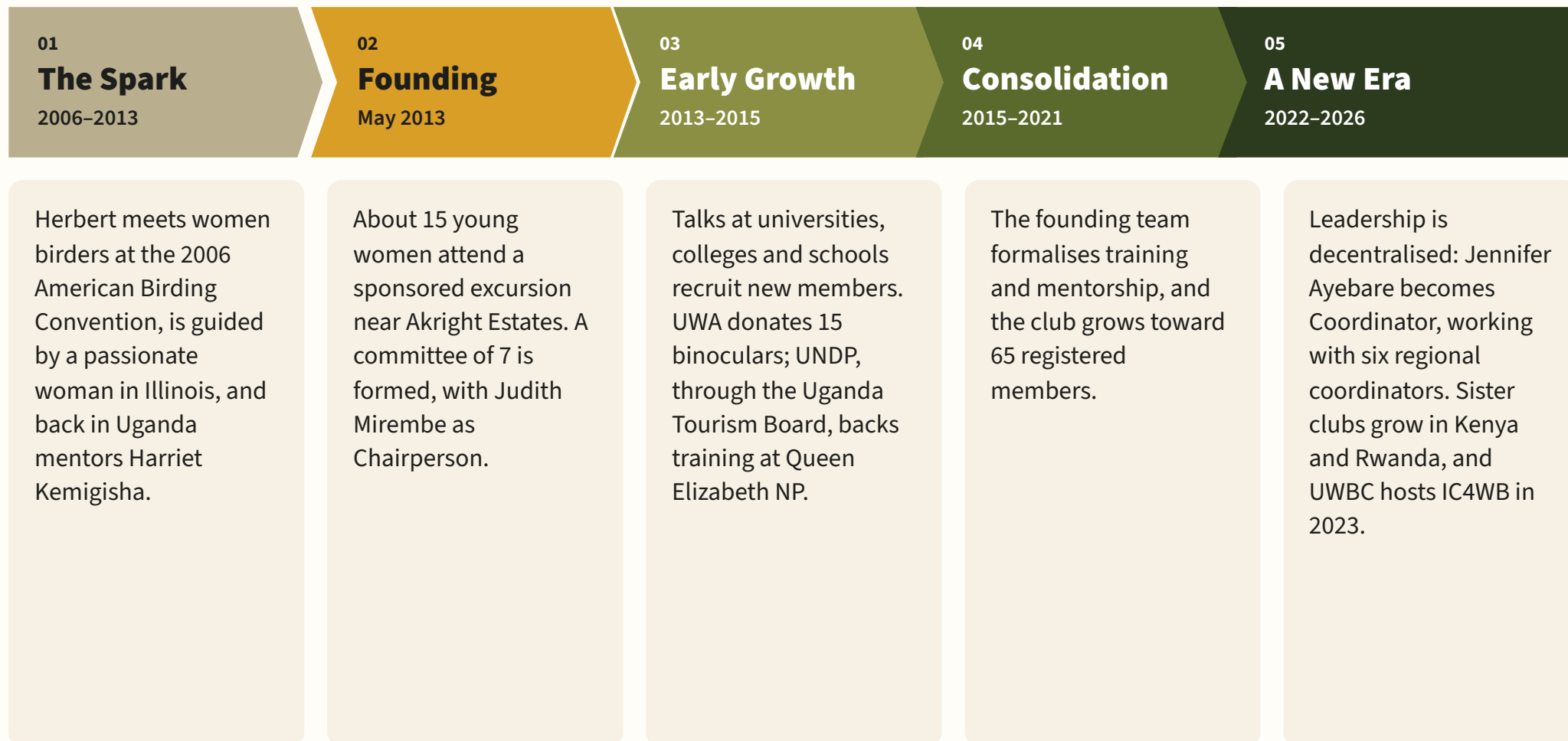
Field practical: members birding together in the forest



Boat excursion on a wetland birding trip

Our Journey, 2013–2026

From about 15 women on a single excursion to a national movement.



Five phases, two leadership generations, one purpose: opening Uganda's birding profession to women.

Where It All Began



2006 Women birders attending the American Birding Convention 2006

From Illinois to Akright to Jinja.



May 2013 The first Uganda Women Birders Club leaders



Sept 2013 Recruiting girl students from the Hotel and Tourism Training Institute, Jinja. Three of them remain active in birding.

The Barriers We Address

Women face several barriers at once, and they reinforce each other. UWBC tackles them together.

BARRIER

Cost of equipment

OUR RESPONSE

Shared binoculars, telescopes and field guides from UWA, the Uganda Tourism Board and Kowa Optics.

BARRIER

Cultural expectations

OUR RESPONSE

Visible women leaders in every region, and senior members as role models.

BARRIER

Skills gaps

OUR RESPONSE

Training in guiding, business management, soft skills and driving.

BARRIER

Limited networks

OUR RESPONSE

Expos, trade fairs, conferences and international exchanges that link members to markets.



Equipment support for members

Key Results, 2013–2026

80+

women trained in birding, guiding and conservation

~70%

now formally employed or running their own business

13

years of continuous growth since May 2013

300+

delegates at IC4WB 2023, the first global conference for women birders

6

regional coordinators bringing training closer to women outside Kampala

3

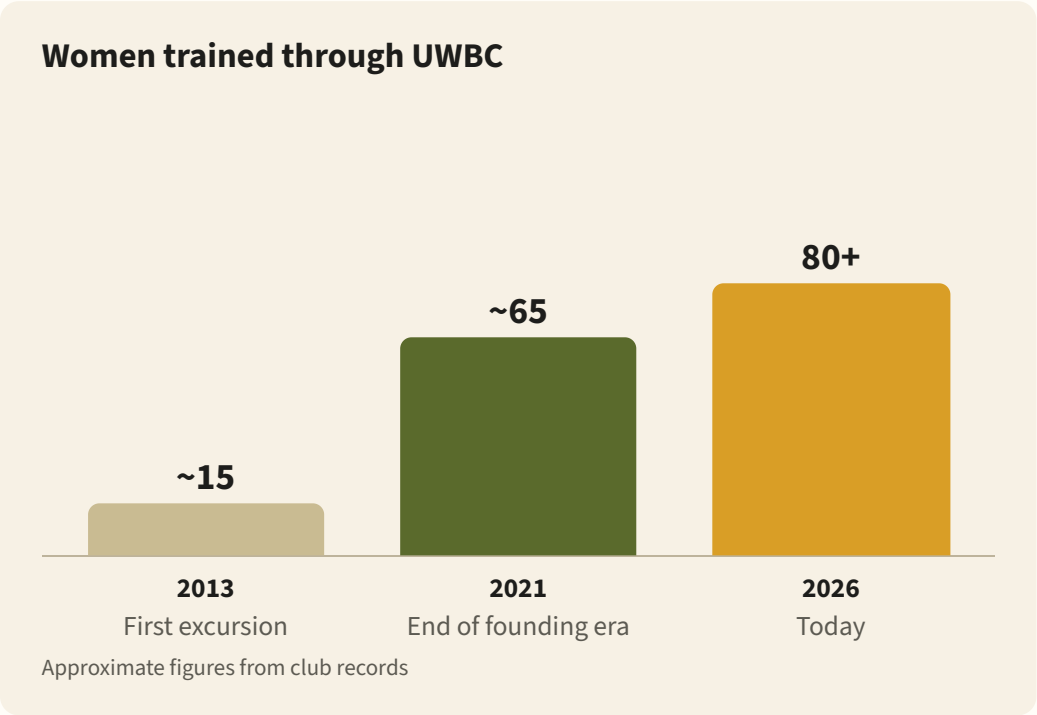
countries with women birders' groups: Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda

7

members on the first leadership committee, formed in May 2013

5

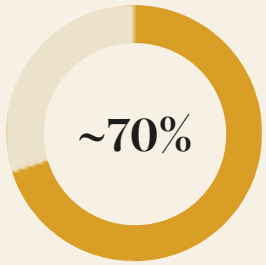
women members who own tourism businesses, including lodges and tour companies



Members studying a field guide to the birds of East Africa

Impact That Changes Livelihoods

Training leads to paid work, and paid work leads to women hiring other women.



of trained members are formally employed or running their own business.

Professional Growth and Employment

Members work as birding, cultural, wildlife and butterfly guides, and as tour managers, reservation officers and tour package designers across Uganda's leading tourism companies.

Entrepreneurship

Members have founded tour companies and accommodation, including lodges near Kibale National Park, creating jobs for other women.



Trained women guides ready for the field

Impact on Conservation Science

Women birders now add to what Uganda knows about its birds.

Judith Mirembe, an EDGE Fellow, leads research on the endangered Shoebill.

Research and Conservation

Members add to Uganda's biodiversity data through eBird, bird surveys and population monitoring, including surveys of the Fox's Weaver, Uganda's only endemic bird, and the Karamoja Apalis.

Training and Skills

Field trips, workshops and mentorship build skills in identification, guiding and conservation, alongside the Global Big Day, national Big Birding Day, expos and conferences.



Members on a forest survey

Beyond the Numbers

UWBC's impact reaches past its own members into schools, villages and the next generation.

"UWBC is giving underprivileged young ladies opportunities to excel in birdwatching, which is quite expensive, especially the equipment."

HARRIET KEMIGISHA

Community and Youth

Members give talks in schools, colleges and villages near birding sites, run tree-planting drives and conservation campaigns, mentor the Young Birders Club and run the Ride for a Woman project.

Empowerment and Networks

Webinars, seminars and exchanges build members' business and leadership skills, with international sponsorships opening doors abroad.



Members at a women empowerment event



Empowering Women Birders: members at a club event

Voices of UWBC

Guides. Researchers. Entrepreneurs. Leaders.



Judith Mirembe

RESEARCHER

First Chairperson (2013–2021). Now eBird Uganda Coordinator and reviewer, sound recordist, driver guide and Shoebill researcher.

“I am forever indebted to UWBC for who I am. It is time to give back by mentoring other ladies.”



Harriet Kemigisha

ENTREPRENEUR

“The Green Breasted Pitta Girl” and one of Uganda’s first female bird guides. Runs two lodges at Kibale National Park and her own company, Harrier Tours.



Jennifer Ayebare

COORDINATOR

UWBC Coordinator, working with six regional coordinators across the country. Works with Gorilla Tours and is pursuing a master’s in tourism.

“UWBC gave me an opportunity to interact and learn from ladies across different regions.”

More Voices from UWBC

*Founding leaders who now guide, train and assess
Uganda's tourist guides.*



Abia Akatukwasa

DRIVER GUIDE

Founding General Secretary, now one of Uganda's leading female driver guides and a Tourist Guides' Assessor.

"UWBC is a place where I learnt a lot from my peers. The excursions were a learning place."



Prossy Nanyombi

GUIDE ASSESSOR

Founding Vice Chairperson, now a bird guide and tourist guide assessor. Known for identifying birds by call, she has trained and mentored many women at Mpanga Forest.

The Next Generation

From trainees to professionals: the next wave of Uganda's women guides.



Patricia Kansiime

BIRD GUIDE

Trained and supported through UWBC into a bird guide, Patricia now mentors and supports women around Kibale National Park.



Alexandria Nazziwa

SAFARI GUIDE

Now a safari guide, Alexandria leads general wildlife safaris and birdwatching tours for companies including Mukisa Safaris and Matoke Tours.



Women guides ready for a morning in the field

Younger members now guiding and mentoring across Uganda.

Putting Uganda on the Global Birding Map

UWBC events give members visibility, markets and networks at home and abroad.



IC4WB 2023 at the Sheraton Hotel, Kampala

01

IC4WB 2023

The first International Conference for Women Birders, held 6–8 December 2023 at the Sheraton Hotel, Kampala. Over 300 delegates attended, including women who run tour companies abroad and partners from BirdLife South Africa. Kowa Optics donated binoculars and telescopes, delivered by Jeff Bouton.

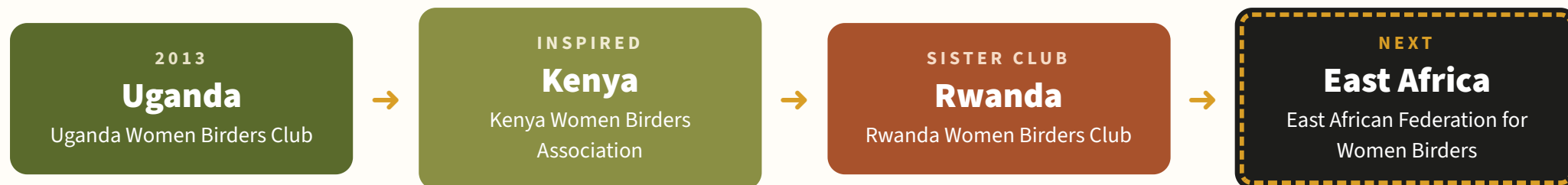
02

Expos and Big Days

Members exhibit at Avistar Brazil and the Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival, join the Global Big Day every year, and help run Uganda's national Big Birding Day.

Beyond Our Borders

A Ugandan idea is now shaping women's birding across East Africa.



01 Kenya Women Birders Association

Established with support from UWBC, extending the model to Kenya.

02 Rwanda Women Birders Club

A sister club bringing Rwandan women into birding and guiding.

03 Next: an East African Federation

Our plan to link women birders' groups across the region and grow women tour leaders in East Africa.



Promoting Uganda's women birders at an international expo

Leadership and Governance

United by purpose. Led by women. Growing in every region.



Coordinator Jennifer Ayebare with the regional coordinators

UWBC rotates leadership on purpose, so members gain governance experience alongside their guiding careers.

FOUNDER

Herbert Byaruhanga

Founder and Executive Director

with ongoing support from Bird Uganda Safaris

Founding Team, 2013–2021

A committee of 7, led by **Judith Mirembe**, Chairperson; **Prossy Nanyombi**, Vice Chairperson; and **Abia Akatukwasa**, General Secretary.

Current Team, 2022–present

Jennifer Ayebare, Coordinator, with six Regional Coordinators:

Western

Central

Eastern

Northern

Southern

Karamoja Sub-region

What 13 Years Have Taught Us

We share our challenges openly, because they show where support makes the most difference.

01

Equipment opens the door

Binoculars and field guides are costly. Shared equipment, starting with 15 binoculars from UWA, made growth possible.

02

Peers teach best

Women learn fastest in the field from other women. Experienced members have coached and supported many trainees.

03

Mentorship keeps women in

Follow-up after training reduces drop-out, which is often driven by childcare and marriage pressures.

04

Local leaders reach further

Regional coordinators put visible women leaders outside Kampala, where cultural barriers are strongest.

05

Be honest about the path

Employers want experience, and gaining it means spending before earning. Clear onboarding reduces disappointment and attrition.



UWBC guides in the field

“Training alone is not enough. Equipment, mentorship and markets must come together.”

Moments from Our Journey

Thirteen years of training, fieldwork and friendship.



Harriet Kemigisha, "the Green Breasted Pitta Girl"



A lakeside birding excursion



Members with participants of the African Birding Expo



Members gathering for a training day



Field training for new birders



Members on an early UWBC field training

Looking Ahead

Our next chapter: more women tour leaders in Uganda and East Africa, a UWBC-owned safari company run by trained women, rural expansion near protected areas, an East African Federation for Women Birders, business mentorship and volunteer links, and conservation education in schools and universities.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Donors

Fund equipment, training and our rural expansion.

Ministry of Tourism

Recognise UWBC formally and include women guides in the national tourism strategy.

Partners

Continue technical and training collaboration, and open your markets to our guides.

Alumni and Members

Mentor a new member and step into regional leadership.



Forest birding session with members and partners, 2026



Members and partners at a birding training event



Training the next generation of women birders in the field

Soaring Higher, Together

Our work is made possible by local and international partners.



Also with: IC4WB · Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities · Uganda Tourism Board · National Forestry Authority · UNDP · GIZ · Mastercard Foundation · Uganda Bird Guides Club

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