

Top Orchid

Summer
2007



BOURNEMOUTH ORCHID SOCIETY

As I write these notes I remember this time last year we were going through a heat wave with weeks of parched soil and brown grass. At that time I was praying for rain as my water butts were completely empty, something I had never experienced before. In complete contrast this year has been the wettest summer since records began and my water butts have always been full. This, of course, is no consolation to all those people flooded out of their homes and businesses.

Temperatures have been low and I have even had the central heating on in my home. I did try putting a jumper on first but after shivering for an hour I pressed the thermo button and dozed off in a warm arm chair and dreamt of tropical islands filled with wonderful orchids.

With all the rain it has not stopped the BOS getting out and about. The new Peterborough International Orchid Show was threatened with a complete washout but, as it happened, was better than we could have hoped. A full report in the next issue of Top Orchid.

The Garden Party, once again hosted by Nina Gregson, was a glorious afternoon, although the weather was very wet before and after. Thanks to Nina for looking after us and organising the sunny weather, how does she do it? The Garden Party is always a well attended meeting with traditionally lots of plants for sale at silly prices. This year was no exception, indeed, the day included a mini auction of plants from a private collector in the Isle of White. Ken Griffiths organised the event and due to the quantity of plants to dispose of he had to sell them in lots. Eventually they all found good homes and should by now have been repotted and showing signs of recovery. Some of the plants looked a bit sad and neglected but on closer examination I was able to observe many new roots raring to get going and with a little care and attention they would soon romp away.

The Autumn Show will soon be on us and you need to ensure potential exhibits will be at their best. Flower spikes must be properly staked and tied, preferably using raffia, but on no account display your plants using those dreadful plastic butterflies which are sold at orchid shows. These are a definite no no and judges will mark plants down if they are used. If you like to use them make sure they are replaced with raffia ties for the Show. Take care to clean leaves and remove dead or damaged portions if possible, especially the brown leaf remains found covering pseudobulbs. This may take a while but is well worth doing as the resulting plants will look much better and help to catch the judges eye. It is important the flowers are shown at their best with their faces pointing straight out or slightly up but never down unless this is their natural habit. I have seen some beautiful flowering plants spoil by bad staking where the blooms are looking down and the temptation to lift up their heads to see them is almost over whelming and many a good plant has missed out on a ribbon due to this fault. Having said all that the important thing is to get your plants to the Show and never make the mistake of thinking your plants are not good enough. Take them along and if you are not sure there are people there to advise. If in the end plants are not able to go on the Show bench then there will always be room on the non-competitive stand where they will still be much admired.

Allan Burdis

Roger Russell

Looking at the different ways orchids have evolved in order to get themselves pollinated and thus provide a continuation of their genes is an interesting aspect to the growing of orchids.

As can be seen from the picture of *Masdevallia mendozae* (which is of the subsection *Saltatrices*) the sepals have fused together along their length to form a tube, unlike most *Masdevallias* which have a more open flower and long tails on the ends of their sepals.

This specie grows in the cloud forests of the Andes on the eastern slopes around 2,000m, rarely more than one and a half metres above the ground and quite often among the litter covering the ground. When the sun breaks through the cloud the temperature can reach the mid 20's C but at night it drops to around 10C. The sun usually only breaks through the cloud for something like two to four hours a day and it invariably rains for a few hours starting late afternoon/early evening.



Due to the shape of the flower it was thought that these *Masdevallias* were probably pollinated by humming birds but when you consider that they grow either on or very close to the ground and under dense low level trees and shrubs it is most unlikely and the following has been observed.

Imagine yourself as a small bug or fly (you can choose!) buzzing merrily along up in the high forest in Ecuador, it is getting late in the afternoon and the sun has disappeared, you think to yourself "I'd better find a nice leaf or something pretty quick or I am going to get a bit of a head ache when it starts raining." So you start searching around under the bushes for some shelter and soon you spy, up ahead, the "Orange Inn". All lit up like a big neon sign, down you swoop, land neatly on the edge of the entrance where there is a nice deep pile carpet (there are small hairs to enable a good grip) and crawl inside. As you get in deeper so the flower will bend down slightly with the extra weight (not that I necessarily think you need to diet!) thus ensuring the guests keep dry. You must keep going to the end of the tube before you can turn around and it is here that you will find the tiny petals of the true flower and of course the pollinia, which unknown to yourself has fixed itself to your back. You will stay all night of course where it is about 2 deg. C warmer and safer from things that like to eat fat little flies. Like all good hotel chains the staff will hope you choose another "Orange Inn" to stay at in the very near future, taking with you your unknown package.

This particular species was discovered by Hartman Mendoza of Ecuador as recently as 1979.

Photo by Roger Russell

Orchids of Ecuador

David Rdgeway April 27

On Friday 27th April BOS were privileged to enjoy a PowerPoint talk by David Rdgeway on the orchids of Ecuador. To the breathy tootling of a panpipe we were introduced to scenes from Ecuadorian life. David then told us something about the country, and how he came to be there. It transpired that in 2005 he had been working as a volunteer at Ecuagenera, a nursery run by the Portilla brothers, Mario and Pepe, and well known to members of BOS and all other connoisseurs of fine South American orchids. Whilst there he made a series of orchid hunting trips, slides from which comprised the main substance of the talk.

Ecuador, we learned, is a country situated on the NW part of the South American landmass. The country straddles the equator, as the name implies, and the Andes mountain chain runs from south to north up the length of the country. The capital is Quito, in the cooler mountains and the largest city is Guayaquil, on the hot and humid coast. It is geologically live, with a large number of active volcanoes, among them Cotopaxi and Chimborazo. Thus there are a large number of orchid habitats and the country is very bio diverse, with a large number of endemics. The habitats range from equatorial rainforest to alpine pastures. The country has been extensively botanised starting with Ruiz and Pavon in the 1790's and including some of the great names of orchid botany, such as Humboldt, Roezl, Warszewicz and Schlechter. The loss of habitat is a serious problem, and in the last sixty or so years around half of the forest has been cleared.

David was based at Ecuagenera which is situated in Cuenca, a town in central Ecuador. At Cuenca Ecuagenera maintain glasshouses and labs for flasking and meristemming. There are satellite nurseries in other parts of the country. From his base David made three trips to view orchids.

Trip 1

David's first trip was down south to Zamora near the Peruvian border to study *Cattleya maxima* in the wild. A number of plants were found growing in bright, dry warm conditions in the tops of trees. This was the mountain form- of compact habit and with bright purple flowers. The locals are in the habit of collecting these for use as widow box plants. Also seen were a range of bromeliads, anthuriums (a type of aroid), some unusual trees and a number of wild tomato species. From Zamora their trip took them into the cloud forest to El Pangl. Here it was generally cooler, dry by day but cloudy and wet by night. We saw slides of two pretty semi-terrestrial Epidendrum: *E. secundum* and *E. calanthum*, which were growing by the side of the road. Also seen were the striking *Sobralia rosea* and later *S. viginalis*. Short forays into the forest produced a large variety of unidentified Pleurothallids and *Oncidium*s in variety, as well as the pretty *Comparettia falcata*. A maxillaria, a *Huntleya* and the lovely and sought after *Neomoo-rea irrorata* were also viewed but to David the highlights of the trip were, firstly, a sight of *Phrag. wallisii* growing on a slope in full sun in soil never dry but never very wet either and then secondly a specimen of. the rare *Selenipedium aequinoctiale*. These are interesting to see in the wild but unrewarding in cultivation as they are large plants with tiny dull flowers. Finally a short stroll showed a number of *Polycycnis*, the swan orchid, like an upside down *Gongora* to which the genus is related and a *Stanhopea* with its pendent, fleshy, short lived flowers.

A truly amazing array of orchids! On the way back to Cuenca they saw the strange hot-lips plant, with a flower like a Salvador Dali sofa. They also saw, growing inaccessibly on a wet cliff by the road, the legendary *Phrag. besseae*. The cliff was basalt and the plant was growing in good light. Later they encountered the very hard to grow *Telipogon andicola*. This is a cool growing orchid with strange bearded flowers on a tiny plant. The interest of the trip was further heightened by a meeting with a fer-de-lance, a lethally poisonous and very aggressive snake. Fortunately the reptile was in one of its rare good moods and, after a photo shoot, everyone parted on amicable terms.

Trip 2 Cuenca to Quito

David's next trip was north from his base at Cuenca to Quito the capital. This is situated at the foot of a volcano, and at 2850m above sea level is the second highest capital city in South America. At Quito is a good botanical garden. This performs the role of educating Ecuadorians in the enormous richness of their flora and is starting to bear results. In the garden the party saw a comprehensive collection of fuchsias, of which 13 are endemic to Ecuador. They also saw the very striking *Maxillaria striata*, a range of *Elleanthus*, a species of *Brassia* and *Phragmipedium caudatum*. Next they went north of Quito into the cloud forest to the Mindo Orchid Reserve. Among the delights they visited a slightly run down theme park with the equator running through it. There was also a farm lying in a volcanic basin. On the way there they viewed *Epidendrum secundum*. This is a variable plant in red, pink and orange. Other *Epidendrum* species were also on view. It is a large genus. Finally they spotted a three metre long *Cyrtorchilum*. However, undoubtedly the highlight of this trip was to another orchid reserve, at El Pahuma. There, among swift-growing *Cecropia* trees were to be seen a feast of orchids: *Ada*, a whole coven of *Draculas*, *Stelis*, *Xylobium*, *Elleanthus*, *Maxillarias* and the for me very yummy *Anguloa virginalis*, a species of tulip orchid. Most of these were growing over or by the frequent streams. A rather dubious pleasure was to see a swarm of guinea pigs at a local farm- which were then served spit-roasted for lunch! Apparently they are an acquired taste, and rather greasy to the uneducated palate.

Trip 3 Cuenca to Banos and back

The third trip was to the resort of Banos ("Baths") a town at the foot of Tumburazu, an active volcano. This was at a high altitude and was distinctly cool, with warmer days and sharper nights. There were a number of terrestrials seen notably the strange *Altensteinia fimbriata*, but the highlight among all the orchids seen was the unusual *Phragmipedium lindenii* a slipper orchid without a slipper. Strange though it may seem it has evolved this way. I wonder what pollinates it?

These slides brought to an end one of the most interesting talks we have had for some time. Graham Smith proposed a vote of thanks which was, after long and loud applause, duly seconded. Hopefully these few words will have done it justice.



Phag. besseae growing inaccessibly on a wet cliff face



Neomoorea irrorata an unusual and rare orchid for the intermediate house.

Photos by Allan Burdis

BOS 49th Annual General Meeting

25th May 2007

MINUTES

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

1. Apologies were received from: Dennis and Doreen Groves, Nina Gregson, Eddie Lowe, John James, Chong Yee Khoo, Irene Low and Ruth Pettitt. All present were very sad to hear that Dennis and Doreen, due to travel difficulties, were not going to re-new their subscription next year.

2. MINUTES OF THE 47th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The minutes of the 48th A.G.M. had been published in the June 2006 Newsletter and also circulated to all members with the notification of the A.G.M. so were taken as read.

At the invitation of the Chairman Derek Copley, Pam Miles proposed and Leo Palmer seconded that they were a true and accurate record of what went on and everybody thought that a good idea and a 'lot' voted, all in favour (there were no abstentions).

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the previous AGM minutes.

4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR SEASON 2006/2007.

There is always the temptation, when 'on a roll' to become complacent and even arrogant, rather than thankful that things are going well, especially when there are societies which really struggle, and when some go out of existence altogether. In spite of that, it has to be said that our Society seems to be getting ever stronger and more successful. But what is success? Is it mainly about statistics? Is it about how many members we have? Or the health of our finances? Is it how many awards we win? Or the numbers of places in which we exhibit each year? Or the UK, European and International Congresses we attend? Or how many qualified judges we have among us?

As in all of life, true success is about people and their relationships. It is not primarily about things. It is the degree to which we offer friendship and encouragement to other people and thus gain fulfilment for ourselves as a result rather than a goal. Whether we are a team serving the public in a supermarket, or a group of teachers, true success is best measured not by our productivity but by our sense of authentic community. I have been really pleased in the last year when people have said 'I would like to do such and such for the Society'. They are really saying 'I value our Society and I want to enrich it by my contribution'. Two people did that in April, and it touched my heart.

Having said that, we really have been blessed with success. Our monthly Show Bench has been good enough to be show in itself. Our Autumn and Spring shows have been a glorious display of form and colour, enhanced by traders who love to come, not merely because they make lots of money, but because they really like us as people.

They have told us that. And hundreds have poured through the doors. We are the favourites of several orchid nurseries. The same goes for the excellent selection of speakers. They have heard about us and gladly accept an invitation from Dr Chong-Yee Khoo. His decision not to stand for a place on the committee this time has been viewed with a sense of real disappointment.

Newbury is no longer! But it had a tidy symmetrical beginning and ending. We won the one and only gold at the very first show, and also at the last one. Thankfully new birth is sometimes a feature of life, and it has been reborn in Peterborough.

Each year is tinged with sadness as we lose members whose time on earth has come to an end. Since we last had our AGM, we have lost Alan Zealy, and our two long term members Dave Cherry and Brian Slade. Our condolences go to their widows and families. It cannot have escaped our notice that our average age is not low! In my career I invest my time in the lives of younger people in Central Asia, and here in the Bournemouth, I would love to see an influx of the next generation of enthusiasts. But how will they know about us? Only if we actively seek to interest those younger than ourselves and talk about the joy of orchid growing-the best hobby in the world.

Finally, I want once more to thank you committee for their hard work, their commitment to the many roles and tasks they voluntarily undertake and for their sense of humour. I thank them for putting up with my style of leadership when sometimes I have to rein them in when they off on one of their wonderful uncontrolled diversions. The word 'fun' would rarely be associated with committee work, but it is the best word I can find to describe the enjoyment we share in working together. Our special thanks go to Colin Carter for his leadership of the Show Committee. While Mike Powell will take on the role for the show in September, Colin will not be too far from some of the day to day tasks associated with our shows. And big thank you to the catering team, and our apologies for using the wrong doors!

Let us all work together to enable the Bournemouth Orchid Society to continue to thrive. Let's enjoy our plants, the talks, and more than anything-each other

5. HON TREASURERS REPORT.

Christine Carter, as usual, then presented an entirely satisfactory and pleasing set of annual accounts which will also be published in the Summer Newsletter but are attached to the original set of AGM minutes. The main points were that, at the year end, the accounts showed £1000.00 less compared with last years and currently show a balance of £2620.00. Membership balance remains the same at 135. As implied at last years AGM we have had to propose an increase in subscriptions due to the rising costs of Hall hire, speakers fee increase and several one off equipment purchases etc. Christine then proposed seconded by Mike Powell that the Societies Subscriptions be increased to £10.00 single and £15.00 double which was voted and approved with none against and no abstentions. Christine offered a special thanks to John James for auditing the A/Cs this year.

The acceptance of these accounts was then proposed by Gwen Ivamy and seconded by Neville Roberts and carried unanimously. There was no discussion. The only question of these accounts was from the Weymouth mafia with a what was considered a totally spurious red herring (they are very fishy from down that way) that if Nick Crabb and Roger Russell were to form a civil partnership could they pay just £15.00 sub between them? Computer and Christine says NO!

ELECTION OF OFFICERS and COMMITTEE 2007/2008.

Committee nominations: Treasurer Christine Carter. Secretary Ken Griffiths. Committee Colin Carter. Mike Powell. Glen Jamieson and Pam Miles. Proposed by Roger Russell Seconded by Allan Burdis. As there were no further nominations the proposed new committee was elected en bloc.

Vice Chairman, Ken Griffiths, then very briefly took the chair and Dr Derek Copley proposed by Glen Jamieson and seconded by Neville Roberts was then re-elected as Chairman with great acclamation, lots of clapping and unopposed.

Ken Griffiths was then proposed by Gwen Ivamy and seconded by Leo Palmer as Vice Chairman and elected without any against or abstentions and Ken looked, uncharacteristically, ever so humble.

The revised rules of the Society then demanded that we elect our President for the year and it was to everybody's delight that Keith Andrew was re-elected our President proposed by Monica Lucas , seconded by Glen Jamieson and, not surprisingly, everybody voted in unanimous favour.

John James in his absence was then re-elected unanimously as Hon Auditor having been proposed by Mike Powell and seconded by David McCreath.

The re-election of our two Vice Presidents, Allan Burdis and Graham Smith was then proposed by Colin Carter and seconded by Roger Russell and passed nem com. Drinks are on them in Miami then?

7. AWARD OF POINTS COMPETITION CUPS.

Derek thanked all the judges and in particular organiser, Glenn Jamieson, for all the hard work that they had put in over the year in making our monthly points competition so enjoyable.

Open Class : 1st Roger Russell. 2nd Christine Carter 3rd Alan Sapsard.

Roger got the little cup, a big cheque for £15.00 and a huge clap.

Experienced Class : 1st Mike Powell 2nd Derek Copley 3rd Colin Carter.

Mike gratefully received a cheque for £15.00 and the appreciation of all present by getting a big clap.

A.O.B.

Allan Burdis in a fit of atypical philanthropy then proposed, seconded by Colin Carter, that the points competition prize money might be increased to £20.00 per class which met with unanimous approval.

As there was no other appropriate business the A.G.M. finished at 20.02 hrs.

Ken Griffiths Hon Sec.

Double Whammy

Congratulations to Chong-Yee Khoo for gaining two RHS awards on Tuesday 24th July 2007.

***Dendrobium tobaense* 'Weimin'** was awarded an Award of Merit (AM) and was a first time flowering which Chong-Yee raised from a flask purchased at the WOC, Malaysia in 2002. A species from Sumatra in Indonesia was discovered on the shores of Lake Toba from which it gets its name.

Described 1993

Chong-Yee managed to raise three plants out of a flask of 50 seedlings which is not surprising as this species is a member of the Formosae section, (formally Nigro-Hirsute). As the former name suggests, all members of this group have pseudo-bulbs covered more or less with black hairs and are notoriously difficult to grow successfully.



***Dendrobium longicornu* 'Quigyu'** was awarded a Botanical Certificate (BC). This species has been in cultivation a lot longer than *D. tobaense* as it was first introduced to cultivation in 1824. Chong-Yee's plant was purchased at the Newbury show in 2003. This is a particularly distinctive cultivar with a most wonderful orange coloured lip, see front cover. This species also belongs to section Formosae but is, in my experience, easier to cultivate than *D. Tobaense*.

Allan Burdis

Photos by Chong-Yee Khoo

Some Thoughts on Watering

Mike Powell

These thoughts on watering are my own.. Agree or not as you please. I often do!

WHY?

The aim of watering an orchid is, obviously, to give it the water it needs to grow. In the water you can also supply food, appropriate to the species you are growing. The action of watering also helps to keep the roots healthy by flushing away old or excess fertiliser which might otherwise build up round the roots and burn them. The objective of watering should be to keep a constant moisture level in the pot suitable for the species that you are growing. For some, this may mean standing in a saucer of water; for others, it may mean being virtually dry. To water successfully you need to know about your orchids. Read a book! Use our excellent library! Acquire by whatever means as many books as you can. Knowledge is power!

HOW?

For purposes of this article we can divide orchids into two groups: "epiphytes" and "terrestrials".

Epiphytes grow on trees(or rocks and cliffs) and receive their water from above. This vital liquid, in the form of rain or mist, falls on the tree, drips from leaves or runs down its branches and trunk to the ground. As it does so it passes over or through any resident orchids, which then collect what they can. When the rain stops falling the orchid dries out. For this reason I always water my epiphytic orchids from the top. Using a plastic disposable glass or yogurt pot and a bucket of feed, I hold the pot over the bucket and pour a glass of water over the top of the pot so that the water runs through the compost back into the bucket. I repeat this two or three times until the compost is thoroughly soaked. Then I leave the orchid to drain and dry out. It helps at this stage to stand the orchid on a newspaper in a well ventilated area at room temperature.. The paper will swiftly and efficiently suck out any excess moisture, leaving the plant just moist. Then I leave the plant to dry out. This will be somewhere between a week and a fortnight depending on time of year and weather outside . Watering too frequently is the quickest way to kill an orchid by rotting its roots.

Terrestrial orchids, on the other hand, grow on the ground, and get their water as it percolates slowly through the ground. The roots suck up this oxygenated water as it moves slowly around them. Therefore I always water my terrestrials from below, by dipping the pots into a bucket of water and feed. The aim of watering terrestrial orchids is to maintain an even level of moisture, rather than flooding the orchid on a regular basis. Terrestrials are much more prone than epiphytes to damping off and rotting and by watering from below you can give a very much finer control of moisture levels, from full flood to almost dry. After a thorough initial watering to settle everything in the pot, I very seldom water further than halfway up the pot and often less than that. Terrestrials with very exacting water requirements such as Satyriums, Disas and orchids from boggy habitats go into very deep pots as used for clematis and roses. You can also mark a plimsoll line on the outside of the pot to give guidance as to how far up you should water.

WHEN?

A large number of orchid species are adapted to high seasonality, meaning that they grow in areas where growth takes place in definite seasons such as winter or summer. The plants grow when conditions are favourable and are otherwise resting or dormant often in the form of tubers or pseudo bulbs. This seasonality indicates the watering strategy and must be respected. This is mandatory. With such orchids it is a good idea to let the orchid tell you when it is ready to be watered by producing a new shoot and roots. Watering out of season is a sure recipe for killing the orchid by causing it to rot.

WITH WHAT?

With water, dear Liza, but it gets a bit more complicated than that! Orchids have evolved over millions of years to grow in a wide range of habitats, which have an effect, both on the quality of water available, and when it is available. A species or genus closely adapted to a given habitat will have evolved to use the water available to it and may not take kindly to a different quality of water. Of course some orchids are not fussy and will thrive on water containing a wide range of minerals and nutrients. Others are demanding and you vary the water quality at your peril. A case in point would be *Disa uniflora*, a South African orchid from a sphagnum or peat bog, where the water is cold, extremely acid and low in nutrients. To give such an orchid water from a tap (which is alkaline and chalky over most of southern England) would kill it. Water quality needs to be matched to the needs of the species or genus receiving it. Thus in a mixed collection you may need several qualities of water to meet the water requirements of all your orchids. In my opinion the best basic water to use is rainwater collected from a clean roof and stored in a plastic container. This should be neutral to slightly acid and should offend nobody. It will also be of 'standard' quality. If you need to make it more acid add a little vinegar. More alkaline? Then add a quantity of hard tap water. Most of the time however, all you will need to add is feed. It is worth mentioning at this point that water collected off a roof covered with concrete tiles may well be alkaline, and if in doubt about this you should test for ph. The chemicals from a soil testing kit will do this, and if the water should prove to be alkaline then adding a quantity of vinegar should correct the ph. Rainwater is definitely best. Tap water is variable in quality over the country. Here in the south it tends to be hard, whereas in the northwest it is soft. It may contain dissolved minerals and metals picked up from the pipes. As stated above it will kill some orchids if it is used on them. If tap water really is all you have then you could well consider investing in a reverse osmosis kit, which will strip out all the extraneous chemicals leaving you with pure water, or else confine yourself to those orchids that will tolerate it. Rainwater also makes feeding a little easier as you do not have to compensate for the nutrients already in tap water.



Disa uniflora

“Others are demanding and you vary the water quality at your peril”

FEED

Watering and feeding go hand in hand. As with watering, to feed effectively you need to know your orchids- and your feed. I like to feed regularly, but what I feed with and how much I feed depends on the particular genus or species I am growing. Some genera are greedy for feed and will take a lot of water and feed over a short period of time, especially if they have a short or highly seasonal growing pattern. A case of grab the grub while you can! Other genera, such as cypripediums or disas are extremely abstemious feeders and will accept only the most dilute solutions of the most gentle organic fertilisers. My advice would be to pick a reliable liquid orchid fertiliser, learn how to use it and how your plants react to it. For the most finicky digestions you could consider using seaweed based fertilisers or dilute fish emulsion, both at a dilution of 1:1000.



Cypripediums formosanum

“Cypripediums or Disas are extremely abstemious feeders and will accept only the most dilute solutions.”

To sum up:

- 1 know your orchids. Go read books!
- 2 water epiphytes from above, terrestrials from below. Use a deep pot for sensitive terrestrials.
- 3 match your watering to the needs of the plant.
- 4 leave plants to drain and dry after watering.
- 5 do not water more than necessary.
- 6 use rainwater- the cleanest possible. Work out ways to collect and store it.
- 7 find a fertiliser you and your orchids like and learn how to use it. Adapt your fertiliser to your orchid, not your orchid to the fertiliser!
- 8 if you and your orchids are growing and thieving ignore everything I have just said.
- 9 Good luck!

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