

# Fredericksburg Nature Notes



## Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

January, 2021 Volume 2 Number 1

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/>

### Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

Bridges are generally viewed as positive structures, both physically and metaphorically. They cross bodies of water or chasms to connect two pieces of land and join people together or allow them to connect to a new place like our nature trails. Metaphorical bridges forge connections between ideas and actions—turning a vision of creating to then building a nature center. Those shared visions of bridges to be built motivated a small group of people to join together to form FFNC, build a strong bond with Fredericksburg Parks and Recreation, and finally link our purpose and vision for a nature center with a whole community. Bridges are effective enablers of human motivations. A whole chain of bridges takes us even further.

When Bill Lindemann first espied a piece of neglected land across Live Oak Creek, he made the leap mentally and physically and crossed over to find a diamond in the rough. Bridges are often preceded by leaps. Bill later fashioned our first plank bridge which was followed by a wider plank bridge constructed by a local aspiring Eagle Scout who earned his badge as a result. The wider bridge invited even more people to cross to the other side and weathered many a storm over the years. By 2020, we had progressed to a need for a new larger bridge that would give better access to an even larger part of the community and better withstand the occasionally destructive flood waters of Live Oak Creek

Now, thanks to Trevor Dupuis (Park Maintenance Supt.) and his crew, Tim Ersch, Katelyn Brazell (Recreation Supt.), and Andrea Schmidt (Dir. of Parks and Recreation), we have a fine new bridge! Our journey expands with a new bridge. Come try it out. It invites your footsteps to the other side where Nature waits.

**Happy Nature Trails and Build More Bridges!**

*Lonnie*

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**OUR MISSION STATEMENT: "To enhance, protect and interpret the natural ecosystems of the Texas hill country while providing educational and quality of life opportunities for members of the community and visitors."**

**Our new bridge  
over  
Live Oak Creek!**

**In Process** →

**Finished Product** ↓



Photo by Bill Lindemann



Photo by Lonnie Childs

# Thanks to the Fredericksburg Parks & Recreation Maintenance Dept.!



Photo by Bill Lindemann

In early December, the Maintenance crew from the Fredericksburg Parks and Recreation Dept. under the leadership of Trevor Dupuis was treated to a pizza luncheon sponsored by FFNC in appreciation for their work on the new bridge over Live Oak Creek.

**Happy**  
**Feliz Navidad!** **New Year!** **Frohes Neues Jahr!**



## Volunteer Spotlight:

### Nancy & Paul Person

**Nancy** was born and raised on Houston's westside, attending Robert E. Lee high school. One of her earliest horticultural memories was planting flowers with her father in their home landscape – a testament to the importance of providing our youth with early experiences with nature that will last a lifetime and motivate future engagement.

After meeting and dating Paul, they were married in 1981 and subsequently moved to San Marcos where they both attended what was then Southwest Texas University. Nancy graduated from the university with a degree in Industrial Arts. After a number of moves with Paul's railroad career, they settled in San Antonio where they lived for 24 years and raised their two sons, Keller and Casey. During this period, Nancy served as cub master with the scouts, room mother, and president of the Parent Teacher Association while the boys were at Castle Hills First Baptist school.

In 2012, upon Paul's retirement, they moved to Fredericksburg. Quickly they decided that they needed more education on how to garden and manage small acreage in central Texas which led them to join the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) and then attend the Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) training which resulted in their certification. In 2016, Nancy also went through the Master Gardener's training and became certified, making her impressively credentialed in central Texas horticulture and nature studies.

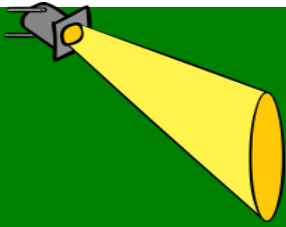
Her volunteerism began through her TMN association which led her to volunteer with the FFNC group at the Pollinator Garden. This connection motivated her participation with other FFNC activities including participating on the Christmas parade float, organizing workshops, and helping with the 3rd Grade Science Day. During this same period, she also volunteered with the local NPSOT chapter as Membership Director and later Vice President.

In 2017, Nancy and Paul opened the Windmill Meadow Farm which specializes in providing cut flowers and arrangements, hosting tours, and conducting floral workshops.

She says that her association with FFNC has offered her the joy of meeting new like-minded people, developing friendships, and accessing the mentorship of some very knowledgeable members.

**Paul** was born in Luling, lived in Shiner, and subsequently graduated from high school in Laredo. His family had a long-term presence in Gonzales where his grandmother owned the still operating Person's Flower Shop while his father owned a business that manufactured plastic flowers in Laredo. Thus, Paul also has a long history with flowers, both real and artificial.





## Volunteer Spotlight:

### Nancy & Paul Person (continued)

After beginning work with the Union Pacific railroad, he married Nancy and later took a leave from work to attend Southwest Texas where he earned a degree in Environmental Science. He subsequently returned to work in the railroad industry, and he worked for a total of 36 years for a succession of companies resulting from mergers and acquisitions. His job involved environmental assessment and remediation in emergency response situations which he says means his job was “cleaning up train wrecks.” - a great skill to have which we have utilized in FFNC!

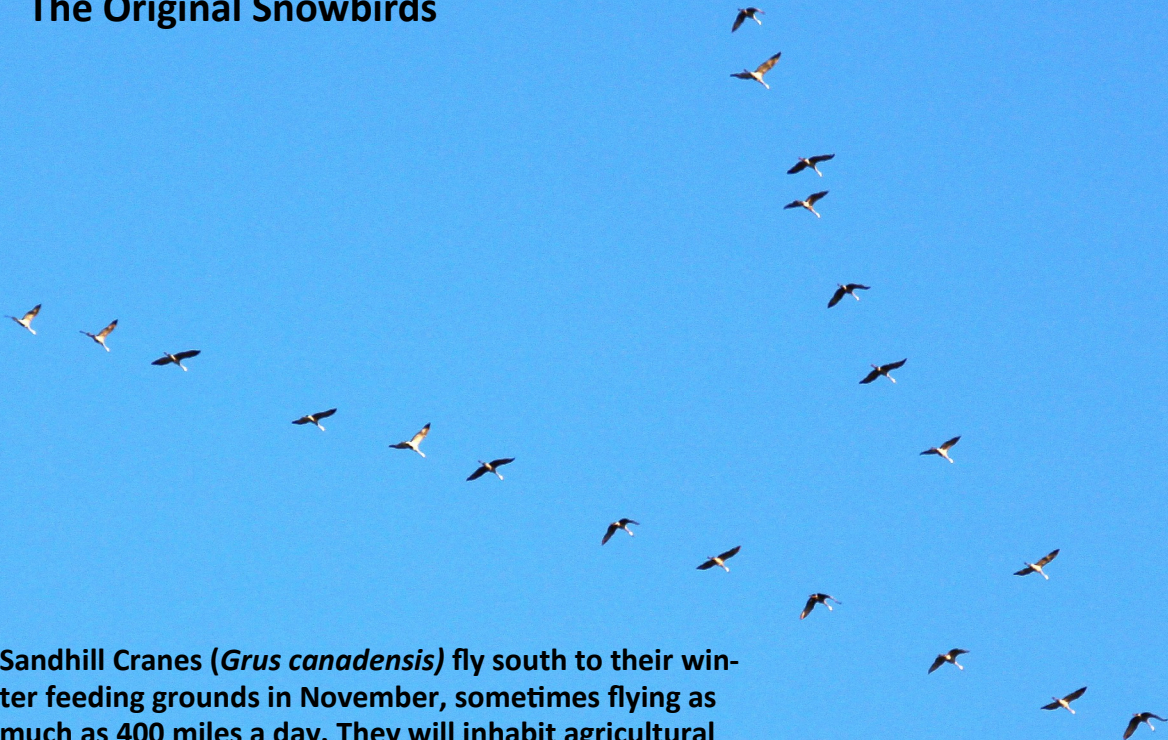
Paul also attended the TMN training with Nancy and later served as Vice President of the Hill Country chapter. During that time, he also began volunteering with FFNC where he has been a jack of all trades always willing to fill in where needed. He continues to serve on the FFNC Board as a valued member.

**Thanks to Nancy and Paul for their efforts to make FFNC a success!**

### The Original Snowbirds

Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) fly south to their winter feeding grounds in November, sometimes flying as much as 400 miles a day. They will inhabit agricultural fields & wetlands in south Texas, the coastal plain, & the Panhandle region where they will feed on grains, small vertebrates, & invertebrates like insects. In recent years, a group has wintered in northeastern Gillespie County.

Photo by Bill Lindemann



*"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"*  
Percy Bysshe Shelley

## Observations Around the Nature Center



Sycamore  
*Platanus occidentalis*

Little Bluestem  
*Schizachyrium scoparium*



Photos by  
Lonnie Childs

Beavers have been constant inhabitants of Live Oak Creek for years.

Beavers cut trees with their teeth for dam-and lodge building and also strip the bark which contains cellulose to eat along with leaves and roots.

Beavers have bodies adapted to a semi-aquatic existence with webbed feet, closable nostrils and ears, and transparent eye membranes that allow them to stay underwater for up to 15 minutes. In small streams, they build dams which create beaver ponds that then generate a whole new evolution of the habitat. In our case, they are not building dams and are likely digging underground lodges along the banks.

### Beaver damaged trees on Live Oak Island





**"I consider myself to have been the bridge between the shotgun and the binoculars in bird watching. Before I came along, the primary way to observe birds was to shoot them and stuff them."**

**Roger Tory Peterson**

## Birds Around the Nature Center



### Ringed Kingfisher *Megaceryle torquata*

Largest of the Kingfishers. Since the 1960s, it has migrated north from Mexico into south & central Texas. For more info & to hear its call, Right click [here](#) & Open Hyperlink.

### Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*

The mid-sized & most common of the Kingfishers that lives throughout North America.

To hear its call, Right click [here](#) & Open Hyperlink.



### The Trifecta of Kingfishers!

For the 3rd year, all 3 of the Texas Kingfishers visited Live Oak Creek. Kingfishers live along woodland streams & ponds, perching in trees, & violently plunging headfirst into the water to catch fish. They have a distinctive profile of a crested head (2 of 3), long bill, and stout body with rufous breast (males only). They may also be noticed flying rapidly along the water from perch to perch.

Photos by Bill Lindemann

### Green Kingfisher *Chloroceryle almericana*

The smallest of the Kingfishers that inhabits south to southwestern Texas. It is uncommon & rare in central Texas. For more info & to hear its call, Click [here](#) & Open Hyperlink.



*"I don't feed the birds because they need me; I feed the birds because I need them."*

**Kathi Hutton**

## Birds Around the Nature Center



Photo by Bill Lindemann

### **Vermillion Flycatcher**

*Pyrocephalus rubinus*

(*Pyrocephalus* = fire-headed)

Look for a small, red bird perched in the top of trees along Live Oak Creek flying out quickly to catch insects & then returning to its perch. These birds inhabit the western half of Texas to the southwest US. One of our most attractive flycatchers.

### **Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula***

Look for a tiny, energetic bird that forages frantically through the lower branches of shrubs & trees. Its habit of constantly flicking its wings is a key identification clue. This plain green-gray bird has a white eye-ring and a white bar on the wing. The male's brilliant ruby crown patch usually stays hidden.



Photo by Bill Lindemann



Photo by Lonnie Childs

### **Great Blue Heron**

*Ardea herodias*

This stately heron with its subtle blue-gray plumage & black & white head often stands motionless as it scans for prey or wades belly deep with long, deliberate steps. It flies majestically with slow, deep wingbeats, tucked-in neck & long legs trailing behind.





# Bird Feeder Tip of the Month

By Susan & Errol Candy



*So you've bought that new "squirrel-proof" bird feeder, and look out on it's first morning of use to find a squirrel wedged under the squirrel guard munching on your seed. And then you say bad words. Take heart. Here's a tip from **Susan and Errol Candy** that doesn't require a new expensive feeder, just some heavy duty fishing line. I've used it myself, and it works great. Also, the squirrels will be pissed! Thanks Susan and Errol! Editor*

--You need two large trees about 25-30' apart, no understory immediately along that 25' distance, and no low-hanging canopy, or dense canopy cover.

--Tie a section of nylon (or other) rope snugly around each tree about +/-15' up—these will be the feeder line anchors.

--Using 65# test microfilament braided fishing line, like 'SpiderWire' or 'Power Pro' (NOT monofilament), tightly secure a length of fishing line from one feeder line tree anchor across the distance to the other tree anchor. We often double or triple the fishing line back on itself to make it more sturdy and visible. You can keep the lines together by knotting them at a few intervals along the length. Sometimes we'll attach a few of those little "cigar float" bobbers along the line.

—Cut some fishing line to create a small loop or two and tie onto the suspended fishing line where you want to hang a feeder. Don't hang multiple feeders in the middle of the line, but also, don't hang them too close to the tree at each end of the line. We use tube feeders (not hopper feeders), suet cake feeders and niger tube feeders and hang two feeders on each line (niger and tube; tube and suet).

—Use shepherd's crooks or other small hangers through the loops so the feeders won't slide down along the fishing line. Hang feeders from the shepherd's crook.

The key is to have enough distance from one end of the feeder line to the other so squirrels can't launch off the tree onto the feeder. Also, when hanging the line, consider height of bottom of the feeder once it is hanging (jumping squirrels), plus, the ability of the person to reach up and remove/replace the feeder for filling and cleaning. If trees are at a premium, you could secure the feeder line between a tree and another structure, like eave of the house, etc.

If the feeder line is in a location where deer come and go, you'd need to allow for the height of a deer standing on hind legs, since they'll bump feeders to get the seed. This setup might prove too problematic for a person to access the feeder (step stool or ladder required?) if you're having to dodge deer.

Over time, the fishing line will sometimes break (if only a single strand), or slacken, which requires re-stringing, but it doesn't happen that often, though.

Doves will try to land on the fishing line without much success. No bird collisions have occurred with the fishing line that we've noticed. Squirrels just stand under the feeders and look up, waiting for seed to be billed out. At our house, they simply can't hang on to the thin line and/or shimmy all the way to the feeders.



*"It's humbling to think that all animals, including human beings, are parasites of the plant world. "*

Isaac Asimov

## Feature Story: The Three Yuccas of Gillespie County by Lonnie Childs

Walking the winter trails can seem less interesting when the summer vegetation has dropped and gone dormant. But winter is a great time to notice the evergreen plants that generally disappear as a backdrop during the verdant seasons, but now they stand out in all their rare greenery. One of those genera of plants that are hard to miss are the Yuccas.

Yes, I know that the response might be, "you mean those pointy cactus looking plants that stick you when you venture too close?" My response is, "No, I mean those plants with the unique architectural form, that wear its fine greenery year around, with an interesting evolutionary story, that are tough and drought tolerant, and will repel hungry deer as well as any plant." I suppose that sort of reveals my bias towards Yuccas.



In Gillespie County, we have three Yucca species of the total of 12 species that can be found in Texas, and those three species can be found on our nature trails. As context, approximately 50 species exist in all the Americas. Since a Yucca species can vary widely in appearance from one habitat type to another and also easily hybridize, the catalogue of Yucca species is still somewhat unsettled and debated.

**Taxonomy.** The classification of Yuccas has been as controversial as the species count. The father of our modern classification system, Carolus Linnaeus, first described this genus in 1757, but unfortunately he confused it with the Yuca plant of the Caribbean, commonly called Cassava root or tapioca. Imagine how exciting and exotic these strange plants must have been to early European botanists, since Yuccas and Agaves are New World species found only in the Americas.

During the 19th century, based on its floral characteristics, Yuccas were placed in the Lilly family, and thus even today you will hear them referred to as "wooded lilies." In the late 20th century, Agaves and Yuccas along with other genera were lumped together into a newly created Agave family. And finally, in recent years, Agaves and Yuccas were placed in the Asparagus family (notice that an Agave flower stalk does look like a giant Asparagus stalk). And one more point, even though they share the characteristic of spines, Yuccas are not cactus!

**Distribution and habitat.** Although we often think of them as desert plants where they do thrive, Yuccas grow from sea level to 8,000 feet and live in habitats that range from the desert to plains to coastal beaches. Their geographic distribution ranges from the southeastern US to the Pacific & from the Canadian prai-

**“There is not a sprig of grass that shoots uninteresting to me.”**

**Thomas Jefferson**

## Feature Story: The Three Yuccas of Gillespie County (continued)

ries to Central America & the Caribbean. In Texas, they can be found in the Pineywoods, on the Gulf Coast plain, the Edwards Plateau, the Panhandle plains, and in the Chihuahuan Desert of west Texas. Soapweed Yucca (*Y. glauca*) grows from the Panhandle all the way up to Canada, making it the northernmost of any species.

**Physical characteristics.** The morphology of Yuccas varies from short stemless grass-like plants to towering, branched, tree-like varieties that can reach 50 ft. The Joshua Trees of southern California provide a good example of the latter. All species technically have stems but the stems of some species never emerge above ground. The leaves are generally composed of linear fibers culminating in a protective spine with coloration ranging from bright glossy green to gray green to pale blue.



*Y. constricta*



Tegeticula Moth

Yucca Moth *Tegeticula yuccivora* (Bilby) Oudem. Alberta, July 9, 1906. Image courtesy of G. G. Asselstorf

Yuccas can propagate in two ways. The common method is by annually sending up an attractive flower stalk of creamy white flowers that are pollinated exclusively by one of several nocturnal Tegeticula or Parategeticula moth species in a “biologically mutualistic” relationship. The Moth picks up pollen while laying her eggs in the Yucca ovaries where they develop into pupae. Yuccas, unlike Agaves, do not die after blooming. The secondary method for reproduction involves the plant sending out underground stems called rhizomes which can host the growth of new individuals to form a mat of plants.

**Ethnobotanical uses.** It has been said that German farmers used every part of a hog except the oink. Paleo-Indians had a similar relationship with the Yucca species. The leaves were harvested and processed for the fiber which could be twisted into rope or the whole leaf could be woven into mats, sandals, baskets, and hats. The flowers and wet fruits were edible. The roots of some species can be wettened and pounded into a fine soap or shampoo.



### The three Yucca species in Gillespie County

**Twist-leaf Yucca (*Y. rupicola*)** -*Rupicola* has Latin origins and translates to “cliff dweller.” This stemless Yucca can be found growing from rocky cliffs or slopes, under the canopy of trees or in the margins of a treed area as it likes a little afternoon shade but blooms best in more sun. On the



**"Botany, the science of the vegetable kingdom, is one of the most attractive, most useful, and most extensive departments of human knowledge. It is, above every other, the science of beauty." Joseph Paxton**

## Feature Story: The Three Yuccas of Gillespie County (continued)



*Y. rupicola*

nature trail, it readily inhabits the slopes below the kiosk near the parking lot and down to the Vista Trail and on the bank of the trail as it skirts along Live Oak Creek. *Y. rupicola* is endemic to the central Texas area.



*Y. rupicola*

Easily recognizable by its bright green leaves that have wavy margins, they appear to twist slightly from base to tip as they emanate from a central axis. The leaf margins are lined with a rusty color and surprisingly have small unseen teeth that can abrade your skin. This Yucca makes a fine soap/shampoo that was used by Native Americans and early German settlers in the area.

**Buckley's Yucca (*Y. constricta*)** Samuel Buckley was state geologist in the 1870s and a naturalist who named this yucca for himself. Other botanists had planned to subsume their similar specimens under other named species, and no one knows why Buckley called it *constricta* (i.e. What is constricted about it?). Thus, Buckley's work as a botanist is not appreciated by modern botanists.



*Y. constricta*

This Yucca has a rosette of thin slightly drooping leaves that have many fine threads along their margins. Amongst the species, about half will be stemless and the others will have stems of 1-3 feet. Buckley's Yucca sprouts flower stalks up to 6 feet tall with greenish-white flowers on maroon stalks. It typically inhabits open grassy areas and can be found along the nature trail on the open meadow near the Live Oak dam



*Y. constricta*

**Yucca treculeana (*Spanish Dagger*)** is the largest of our local Yuccas. We have one specimen that we planted in the Cactus Garden at the far end of the Live Oak trail (you can't miss it!), but it may be found in the wild locally on the north end of the Willow City Loop (it likes the granitic sand of the Llano Uplift). Its' geographical distribution stretches from south Texas and the Gulf Coast plain north to the Llano River basin and west to New Mexico.

*"If you are needful of inspiration, simply take a walk in Mother Nature's moccasins – walk softly, gaze intently, listen carefully, and open your heart."*  
John Muse

## Feature Story: The Three Yuccas of Gillespie County (continued)



*Treculeana* derives from A. A. Trecul, a French botanist who passed through the area in 1850. Of course, the common name needs no explanation, although it is attached to several other species. When I work around the specimen in my home landscape, I wear a hard hat, safety glasses, and long sleeved gloves, although I could really use a complete Kevlar suit!



Spanish Dagger is a trunked variety that branches and can grow to 15-20 feet in south Texas. Our local specimens only

reach about 10-12 feet and are bulkier than the south Texas cousins, since the branches of the local variety emanate from the base of the existing stem and not higher up. Its leaves are dark green measuring about 2 inches wide and 2 feet long. The rosette crown is somewhat organized and supports a flower stalk that only extends up about 1-2 feet but is a dense cluster of gorgeous creamy flowers that are tinged maroon.

Next time you walk the trails, stop, stifle your preconceptions, and give these species a fair assessment. In the spring when they show off their attractive creamy white flower-stalks, new found appreciation may come even easier. Remember the thorn of a rose is veiled by the smell of the rose. Besides, Agaves and Yuccas are the growing rage in contemporary landscapes, so get with the times!





*"Outside of a dog, a book is Man's best friend.  
Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read."*  
**Groucho Marx**

## Book Review by Lonnie Childs



### BOOK REVIEW

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#### ***ONE MORE WARBLER A LIFE WITH BIRDS***

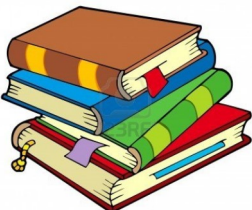


Emmanuel, Victor with Walsh, S. Kirk, University of Texas, 2017, 254 pages

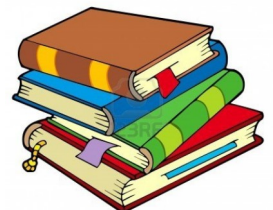
Victor Emmanuel's memoir is not surprisingly an account of his life viewed through his experiences as a preeminent birder in a style and language meant to appeal to the birder. In fact, much of the account and almost all of the stories focus on birding experiences that influenced his life and informed his development as a naturalist and person. In his words, "Many times, I have experienced the healing power of nature through birds."

Each chapter and story references a bird that was at the center of that story in some way. He begins with his early life in Houston and an account of how he first engaged with birds after seeing the iconic Male Cardinal and the mentors who helped to develop that interest and expertise. Demonstrating admirable initiative even in his youth, Emmanuel established the highly successful Freeport Christmas Bird Count at age 16 and went on to form his renowned Victor Emmanuel Nature Tours at age 35. Along the way, he befriends Roger Tory Peterson, Peter Matthiessen, and George Plimpton among others who become lifelong companions as he birdwatches and expands his tour business around the world. The real power of the book lies in the strength of these birding tales with eminent friends in places such as Attu, Antarctica, Bhutan, and his beloved Upper Gulf Coast. Indeed, reading his birding life story parallels and provides insights into the history of birding in the US over the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The book ends with his coming home to the Bolivar Peninsula and describing a day in the life of birding on the peninsula. Even after 60 years of birding around the world, he is still excited to see that brilliant red male Cardinal that first captured his imagination. He summarizes the nature of his ornithological obsession with a story about how every day is bolstered with the motivation to see just "one more warbler." This book is an enjoyable read for any birder that will no doubt inspire you to pick up those binoculars and head for the wild.



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*"After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, love, and so on — have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear — what remains? Nature remains; to bring out from their torpid recesses, the affinities of a man or woman with the open air, the trees, fields, the changes of seasons — the sun by day and the stars of heaven by night."*  
*Walt Whitman*



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**Please consider continuing to support FFNC.**

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