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Tadoba

DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



ADITI THAKUR

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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Coexistence Conundrum

The Chandrapur Super Thermal Power Station (CTPS) has been in the news, in recent times, for something other than power generation. An apparent incident of death of a person in a tiger attack in the central plant area of CSTPS has put the spotlight on tigers living in the vast campus of the power plant extending to more than a thousand hectares. Though it is not new for the residents and workers of the power plant to see the tigers in the campus, no tiger had so far attacked any human being in the area. On the other hand, unfortunately, leopards have caused injuries and in few cases, even death of people. It is pertinent to note here that the CSTPS and coal mines of Western Coalfields Ltd. (WCL) are on the southern edge of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve and the forest fragments between

act as corridors for the movement of the tigers and other wildlife to connecting forests. Over the years, the tigers in search of new territory seem to have found a suitable, although unnatural, habitat in the vast areas of coal field with overburdened and uncontrolled undergrowth of bushes in unused areas of the power plant.

The recent incident has led to public outcry over the safety of workers and a possibility of the tigers entering the city's civil areas, considering the proximity of the breeding satellite population of the tigers in CSTPS and WCL areas. Taking immediate measures, the forest department's rescue team has so far been able to capture one male tiger from the premises and the operation to do the same for other tigers in the premises continues. In these circumstances, the question that is put forth by animal activists is 'why are we capturing the tigers when human beings have encroached upon their natural habitats?'

The answer to this question goes to the root of how we need to manage our relationship with the wild animals to achieve harmonious existence. Taking the case of Chandrapur district as a point, there have been around 45 human deaths in the year 2021 alone caused by the attack of wild animals most of them tigers. Such a high level of conflict with wild animals is not conducive for long term survival of the species. Ultimately, wild animals survive on the goodwill of the communities and once that goodwill is lost, probably we will lose the wildlife in no time as we have seen in the past. Resources seem to be secondary when it comes to living with large carnivores. This is very much evident from the fact that most of the resource rich countries in the world do not have good populations of carnivores as there is no public acceptance to the idea of sharing space with them.

Similar level of conflict is being witnessed in several other landscapes of the country be it Terai forests of North and north-east India, sugarcane fields in Western Maharashtra and even the outskirts of Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai.

There is no one solution to this situation; but a judicious combination of awareness of animal behaviour, reduced dependence and resultant reduced interface with the forests, proper waste management which can eliminate the factors that attract wildlife to human habitations, preventing the creation of unnatural habitats in residential and industrial areas occupying vast extent of lands closer to sanctuaries and national parks and finally, capturing problem animals proactively to avoid any retaliation from the communities. Additionally, there is a need to secure some critical corridors for safe movement of wildlife. We need to understand that there are no quick fixes, but the solutions are rather easy. What it needs for all of us, especially the multiple authorities like forest department, police, village panchayats, municipal corporations and industries, is to work collaboratively and understand the implications of their management decisions on wildlife and choose wisely.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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Yeh Dil Mange More!

- Siddharth Chandekar
Actor



Mystery series City of Dreams fame actor Siddharth Chandekar and his actor wife Mitali Mayekar visited Tadoba last month and fell in love with the Reserve. With wildlife as a newly found passion, it was their first visit to Tadoba. Tadoba Diaries spoke to Siddharth at Jharana Jungle Resort near Navegaon gate.

Q: How did you get attracted to wildlife?

A: My wife Mitali is a wildlife lover. A very interesting incident pulled me into it. In Mumbai, I stay at Goregaon which shares its boundary with Sanjay Gandhi National Park. On my birthday, I was standing at my window and I was pleasantly shocked to see a leopard sitting on a wall down below! Such a majestic animal it was! He was there for good 40-45 minutes and I clicked a lot of pictures of him. To watch an animal, in what I thought was the most unexpected of places was magical.

Q: How did you like Tadoba?

A: It was indeed a beautiful experience to be here. The jungle is enchanting! The animals are beautiful, and look so fit. I had safaris in core as well as in buffer. The buffer zone is equally beautiful. We could sight tiger a multiple times and were extremely lucky to sight a leopard also. We enjoyed watching other animals like sambar deer, blue bull etc. from a very close distance. We saw various types of owls and eagles. I could also capture a male Asian Paradise Flycatcher in my camera.

Q: What was the best moment of the trip?

A: This trip gave me many unforgettable moments. The best among them was when a fully grown male tiger stared straight at me! We were on a safari in buffer zone. We got to know from another safari guide that a tiger was sighted nearby. When we reached the spot, T- 138, popularly known as Mowgli was sleeping in the bushes near a waterhole. We could see him partially. We decided to wait till he gets up and we waited for two and-a-half-hours! Finally he got up and came out of the bushes. He was huge. He wanted to cross the road. I was so glad to see that all the Gypsies present there retreated to make way for him! Mowgli then slowly and elegantly walked through the road. At one point of time, he was merely 10 to 15 meters away from me and then he suddenly looked at me! Straight into the eyes! That stare! I froze on the spot! Even forgot to click pictures. I don't think I can ever forget that stare!

Q: Would you like to visit to Tadoba again?

A: We had total six safaris in Tadoba. Today is our last day here. In the morning itself, we were discussing the possibility of extending our stay and getting a couple of more safaris. Unfortunately, our professional commitments did not allow us to do so. But we will certainly come back because Yeh Dil Mange More!

Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR



Tadoba Beyond Tigers



Symphony of the Forest

Do you ever wonder from where do the tiny droplets of water fall on you from when you walk on the forest trails? You look at the cloudless sky on a hot summer afternoon to check if it's drizzling, but instead your ear catches the melody of Cicada even before you could see their large eyes and shimmery wings.

Plant fluid is Cicadas' principal food and they accumulate waste matter and fluid in a rectal pouch. The waste is released and disposed of all at once through the anus and that's where the Cicada rain comes from.

My summer memories from the central Indian forest are incomplete without mentioning the choir of Cicadas. Did you know that they are the loudest insects in the world? The intensity of their sound is as high as 120 decibels! While most people get annoyed with their choir, I enjoy the lively conglomeration of Cicadas proclaiming the arrival of the monsoon.

Cicadas are members of the order Homoptera, close relatives of the aphids and leafhoppers. These creatures have a fascinating life cycle. The powerful song of a Cicada is the male calling the female. Post mating, the female lays her eggs on twigs or grass stems. The newly emerging young look like termites, and stay on the plant, feeding on plant fluid till they are ready to drop down to the ground. This is the next stage of their life cycle, where they burrow into the earth, living and feeding on roots. Tunnelling through the earth with their powerful front legs, the nymphs burrow underground, spending a major part of their lives there, for as long as 13 years till they are finally ready to emerge as adults.

Prajakta Hushangabadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR

Glorious Teak

The British can be attributed with the widespread distribution of teak in our country. The formation of the leaves of teak is interesting, as each pair of leaves is at 90° to the pair above and below- to maximise the ability to trap sunlight. Its excellent wood gained popularity for durability and water resistance. These features make the wood useful for boat building, exterior construction, furniture and carvings. U Bein Bridge in Myanmar is the longest Teak Bridge (1.2 km) in the world.

The molecular studies show that there are two genetic origins of teak: one in India and the other in Myanmar and Laos. Maharashtra's 'Glory of Allapalli' is famous for high quality old huge teak trees. The tallest ones has a height of almost 40 metres and another has a girth of 5.25 metres.

Very often, people wonder – who would be the artist making the intricate mesh-like patterns on teak leaves. It took me time to figure out that it was actually the work of a hungry moth caterpillar. Many trees like the tough teak (*Tectonagrandis*) are often affected by the caterpillars of the Leaf Defoliator Moth (*Hyblaea puera*).

The adult moths are small creatures with a wingspan of three to four centimetres. They have grey wings with an orange inside. After mating, females lay 500 to 1,000 eggs under the surface of leaves. Within a couple of days, larvae hatch and immediately the little caterpillars start eating. Within no time, the fleshy part of the leaf is devoured, leaving behind the artwork of leaf veins (in picture) and a much fatter Leaf Defoliator Moth caterpillar!

Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist

Safari

Cute Fur-Balls

After hearing my friends rave about the sheer beauty and mesmerizing nature of the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve for a long time, I finally made my first trip there along with my parents in February 2022. That morning we were on our third safari in the core zone with Akshay Suryawanshi- Naturalist, Irai Safari Retreat and our driver Ashish Dhamankar.

We heard that the tigress T-24, popularly known as Sonam had recently had a litter, but the new cubs had apparently never been clicked. Not even the Forest Department had seen pictures of them. Some two hours into our drive, Sonam decided to introduce her cubs to the world, through us! After an excellent spot by Akshay at the Telia Lake, we caught up with Sonam at the nearby fire line, barely two kilometres from the Moharli Gate. What we didn't expect to see, were her cubs, as they followed their mom across the tar road. Ours was the only gypsy anywhere in sight. Every single one of us was left speechless and frozen when we spotted Sonam emerge from the bamboo trees, till Ashish whispered to me "Madam, it's time to pull out your camera! They are coming out onto the road." It was a sight to behold, our hearts filled with joy watching these amazing animals. Sonam looked as gorgeous as ever, calmly guiding her tiny cubs to their destination. She stopped and looked over her shoulder, ensuring safe passage. While their mother was watchful, the cubs were playful, unbothered and seemingly posed for the camera. They leaped and jumped around, briefly plopping themselves onto the road as they waited to be led. As they slowly made their way across the road, we were left overwhelmed by what we had just seen.

We felt incredibly lucky that Sonam had chosen to give us the honour of showing us her little fur-balls, and promised to keep coming back to TATR and its residents every chance we got.

Aditi Thakur
Tourist, Hyderabad



Gypsy



Tadoba Never Disappoints

I am very proud to be from the first batch of safari guides that got an opportunity in 1998. Since then I have been to Tadoba's core area thousands of times, guided tourists on safaris, led walking trails through the forest and seen the tiger hundreds of times. While enjoying wildlife sightings, I have also enjoyed observing human behaviour while interacting with tourists from across the world.

Once a resort owner from a tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh, along with his wife visited Tadoba. I was their

safari guide. I took them to Kolasa, Teliya, Pandharpauni and all other locations where there was a possibility of tiger sighting. Unfortunately, we did not see a single tiger. This guest of mine started cursing my forest. "Hamare yaha chappe-chappe par tiger dikhta hai. Yaha to kuchh bhi nahi." I tried to convince him that, unlike in a zoo, no one can guarantee a tiger sighting in a forest; but he was in no mood to pay heed. He kept on complaining.

When I took our gypsy to Teliya for the second time, we heard spotted deer's alarm calls. Within a few seconds, two spotted deer rushed across the road just in front of our gypsy, followed by the then Queen of Teliya - T-10 – popularly known as Madhuri! She came on the road and sat near our gypsy. Only 10 to 15 feet away! The complaining guest was not only silent, but so scared that he first shifted from the back seat to the middle seat where his wife was sitting, and then to the driver's cabin! Madhuri yawned, and his wife also left her seat, and pushed herself into the driver's cabin! Both were shivering with fear!

At the end of the safari, I asked him, "Now what do you think about my Tadoba?" Still not completely out of the shock, he only managed to say, "Ab pata chala, tumhare Tadoba ka naam itana mashahoor kyo hai!!"

Vasant Sonule
Guide, Moharli Gate

Queens of

On the occasion of International Women's Day on March 8, we celebrate the female tigers of Tadoba Tiger Reserve, and to make it a top destination of big cat aficionados. These majestic CatWives roam the forests and surrounding forests. While each one of them has a unique character.



T-10

Super Mom

At the age of 14/15 years, T-10, popularly known as Madhuri is the oldest living tigress in TATR. Having delivered 21 cubs till date in six litters, she is the Super Mom of Tadoba. Tourists know her for her road shows with young cubs. Born in 'Waghdoh area', she made Teliya Dam her home. Her second litter gave birth to the iconic BBC documentary 'Four Sisters of Teliya'. The four cubs lovingly named as Lara, Mona, Sonam and Geeta attracted thousands of tourists to Tadoba. The most aggressive among them, T-24 called Sonam pushed Madhuri out of her territory. Since then Madhuri is settled in Moharli buffer zone. Today most of the tigers in Moharli range are her lineage.

Queen of Pandharpauni

She is the most popular tigress of Tadoba. T-12, popularly known as Maya has ruled over not only her stronghold Pandharpauni, but also the hearts of lakhs of photographers for over a decade. She got her name Maya from the 'M' mark on her neck. Her daring hunts stunned tourists multiple times. On the days when there were no sightings of tiger in the reserve, Maya did not let the tourists down, and would more often than not, stroll by. She delivered 12 cubs in four litters, though very few of them survived. She continues to guard her large territory fiercely.



T-12



T-24

Dominant Sister

T-24 is popularly known as Sonam because of the 'S' mark on the right side of her neck. The most dominant among the famous 'Four Sisters of Teliya', Sonam snatched the Teliya Dam territory from her mother T-10 Madhuri a decade ago. Her very young cubs are a major attraction currently! She showed her strong mother instinct in the past by killing leopards to protect her cubs. Once she almost lost her eye a fight with other tiger. However she emerged even stronger every time she faced a threat.

of Tadoba

tigers of Tadoba, six tigresses that have contributed to the revival of Tadoba-Andhari. They are not only blessed wildlife tourists with their sightings, but have helped populate Tadoba. In other words, they have one thing in common – their tourist friendly behavior.

- Roshan Katkar

Show Stopper

One of the famous 'Four Sisters of Teliya' T-19 is popularly known as Lara. Carrying her mother T-10 Madhuri's legacy, she is currently mesmerizing tourists with roadshows with her four cubs in fourth litter. When her sister T-24 Sonam pushed her out of Teliya, Lara went to Moharli buffer area. She used to do cattle kills in Junona. Like her mother T-10 Madhuri, she too was pushed out of her territory by her own daughter, popularly called Collorwali. Hence during her third litter, she came back to core and replaced Devdoh female in Khutwanda-Palasmaon road area.



T-19

Mrs. Cool



T-7

T-7, popularly known as Tara is considered to be the most cool and calm tigress of Tadoba. Born in Moharli range, Tara and her three siblings used to be called Circuits because of a unique habit. All these four cubs used to come out on the road as soon as they used to hear the sound of approaching tourists' vehicles. After the separation from her mother, she shifted to Tadoba range and settled in Jamni when the village was relocated from TATR. She is the longest monitored tigress through a radio collar. The Wildlife Institute of India collared her from 2014 to 2021 to study her behavior.

Show-Woman

T-127, popularly known as Madhu is a perfect show-woman just like her mother T-10 Madhuri. She was born of Madhuri's third litter. Even at a very young age, she did not shy away from tourists. When her other siblings hid, she would boldly come out to bless the photographers. Even today she is the most sighted tigress in the buffer zone. She is also known for hunting in front of tourists. Her photos and videos carrying the kill have gone viral. Currently she is ruling Ambezari-Pardi area.



T-127

Trapped in Camera



CAT WALK! A jungle cat taking a night stroll in her territory while a resting Indian Gaur stares at her. Image captured on a camera trap installed in Tadoba.

Eco-Tourism

Machan Stay

Have you ever spent a night on a machan inside the forest? Earlier, this opportunity was available only on the Buddh Poornima night, though only to select volunteers. Now at TATR, you can enjoy this lifetime experience on any night! Staying on a machan overnight is the best way to listen and observe nocturnal life - insects, birds and mammals that may happen to be around the machan. If you are lucky, you may sight animals coming to the waterhole in the starlit night.

Location: Agarzari, Devada, Adegaon, Junona Gates

Booking: On the spot | Contact: 9579160778 / 8010539472



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On Duty



Sunita Mattami
Forest Guard, Moharli



Swati Maheshkar
RFO, Chandrapur Buffer.



Rekha Mundale
Forest Guard, Karwa

Daughters of the Forest !

The front line workers in the Forest Department face difficult working conditions as they are involved in the on filed operations. They battle wildlife criminals, intruders, wildfires, and more importantly human-wildlife conflicts. The women frontline workers are in no way less than their men colleagues when it comes to performing duties that involve various kinds of dangers. What better occasion can it be than the International Women's Day to recognize their efforts and hard work?

“We never let our gender be an excuse to avoid work. In fact, our feminine sensitivity is our biggest strength and we use that to do our job effectively,” says Swati Maheshkar, RFO, Chandrapur Buffer. She is working with Forest Department since 2006 and is known as one of the efficient officers in the region. Ask her and she will tell you how challenging it was to work in Bhadrawati which is an industrial area as well as a wildlife corridor. “We are the de facto peacekeepers of between human and wildlife. We have to protect both from each other. One of the worst situations is facing a hostile mob during a rescue operation. Empathy plays an important role in pacifying the mob in such a tense situation.”

Once a tiger was roaming around Bhadrawati bus stop area for nine days. In another incident, a leopard had entered the Anganwadi. To her credit, Swati has successfully led many such rescue operations and is highly appreciated by her seniors and team members for her vigour and dedication.

While dealing with communities is a tough job, working in the dense forest full of unpredictable wild animals is not very easy either! . “When I got my first posting at Tadoba in 2019, I was very frightened and worried how I would work in the forest! But then slowly I got so connected to it that now I feel as though I belong there.” says Rekha Mundale, Forest Guard in Karwa range at TATR. According to her, once you find that connect with the nature, you start enjoying activities like patrolling, firefighting, rescue operation etc. They no more remain 'work' for you.

However passionate one may be towards wildlife, the risk of dangerous encounters with wild animals is always a worry. . “Such encounters test your mettle and your gender does not matter at all,” says Sunita Mattami, Forest Guard in Moharli range at TATR. Working with Forest Department she has faced many such incidences. While on duty at Shivni range, Sunita and her team found that a camera trap installed at a waterhole was missing. They started searching for it. While searching they failed to notice the presence of a tiger in the bamboo thickets and reached very close to him. He suddenly got up and charged at the team. Sunita listened to the experienced Vanmajoor in her team, got all five members together and started shouting loudly at once, with the sticks in their hands raised. The tiger still charged thrice. But instead of running, Sunita stood firm with the team. Finally the tiger calmed down and sat at his original place watching them. Sunita slowly retreated from the spot without showing back to the tiger. And the missing camera? “We found it after a week!” smiles Sunita.

Swati, Rekha and Sunita represent the hundreds of the “daughters of forest” who are braving tigers and other dangers, guarding our forests, wildlife and lives of local communities; with courage, and a smile.

Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR

Grasslands in Tadoba



Grasslands are critical to the health of any ecosystem as they provide the necessary grazing, resting, hiding, and breeding ground for all kinds of predator and prey species dwelling in an area. They are typically the area in which the vegetation is dominated by continuous cover of grasses and some herbs, shrubs, and wild leguminous plants. The roots of the grass and the plants maintain the soil water / moisture and prevent it from evaporation during the summer season thus helping conserve the quality of the soil.

Grasslands in Central India are of taller and intermediate type, but the annual form of grasslands are adapted for different climatic conditions. Total 24% of the geographical area of India is covered with grasslands which are decreasing at a fast pace due to the invasion of woody species and weeds. Grasslands are heterogeneous in composition. Grasslands are mainly found in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. Banni grassland from Kutch, Gujarat is the largest grassland in India.

Incidentally there are no natural pastures within Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve area. However after the rehabilitation of villages like Navegaon, Jamni, Pandharpauli, and Palasgaon new grasslands are being developed and managed in a scientific manner. The roadside grasslands and internal grassland patches play vital role in interconnection of grasslands of TATR. Around 885 hectares of grassland amounts to 7-9 % of the total Tadoba landscape.

All three types of grass varieties – smaller, intermediate, and taller – can be found here. The most noteworthy among them is Vetiver grass (scientific name - *VitiveriaZizanioides*), also called Khus and is found in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. This grass is native of India and tropical Asia. Predators like tigers and leopards have been observed to use the four to give feet Khus grass clumps to make ambush attacks on deer or wild boars around Tadoba, Telia and Jamnilake. Another predominant local grass variety is *Cynodondactylon*, commonly known as Harali grass. It's a perennial, palatable grass used by spotted deer in grazing habitat.

The rich diversity in the TATR also offers almost 6 to 7 different wild leguminous plants in the grasslands here. *Hyptissaveolens* (Bhutganjya) is a dominant weed in grassland. Amphiterrestrial grasses are distributed in the water bodies in the grasslands. The most challenging work is removal of *Zadugawat* and its restoration.

Management of these grasslands is a challenging process. Weeds and other unwanted woody species have to be identified in time for removal and have to be uprooted before fruiting, Ecological restoration processes have to be undertaken in the prescribed scientific way, and the grassland has to be enriched / restored by selected and suitable grasses. It is a process which goes on throughout the year.

The frontline staff in each range of TATR are trained for grasslands management. They prepare maps of each

.... continue on page 11

Super Click

INDRAJEET MADANI



DARSHAN! *Unko khuda mile hai khuda ki jinhe talaash; mujh ko ek jhalak mere dildar ki mile!* A frequently visiting wildlife devotee from Nagpur entered TATR from Nimdela gate and got a *darshan* of this magnificent tiger in Ramdegi buffer.

.... continued from page 10

Grasslands in Tadoba

grassland, identify grasses and weeds, demarcate areas for weeds removal, uproot the weeds 2-3 times a year before fruit formation and prepare herbarium. The staff is also trained to identify wild leguminous plants, collect seeds, prepare grass seed plots, and store the seeds for the enrichment of grasslands with suitable grasses. Along these tasks they also have to maintain grasslands management registers.

There are two different methods for ecological restoration of grass – seeds addition and grasses bundles with seeds addition. This activity is carried out in the month of November or December. Grass seeds collection is completed within appropriate time with respect to seeds maturation i.e. in the month of May and June. Grass seeds start broadcasting before rains. -Rehabilitated village areas, or gaathan areas as they are commonly referred to, especially require attention during the initial period when



they are weed prone. These are selected for restoration by good fodder grasses. Relief enclosures are prepared for seeds collection and rotational grazing.

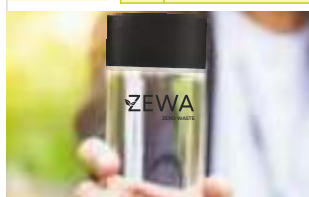
The impact of an intensive nearly two year effort within TATR is now evident : a better trained staff at work, infrastructure like relief enclosures in place, weeds eradication in progress, grassland enriched with varieties suitable to wild herbivores, and continuing ecological restoration by adding suitable grass seeds / grass bundles.

The tourists are largely unaware of this backstory. The tigers they spot around the grasslands are attracted by the sizable prey population the restored grassland support.

Prof. Gajanan Muratkar

Grasses Expert, Head, Dept. of Environmental Science Arts, Science & Commerce College, Chikhaldara, Amravati

Sr. No.	Palatable / fodder grasses	Common name	Herbivores
1	Cynodon Dactylon	Harali Grass	Spotted Deers, Barking Deers
2	Dicanthium Annulatum	Lahan Marvel Grass	Spotted Deers, Barking Deers
3	Dicanthium Caricosum	Mothi Marvel Grass	Sambar, Indian Gaur, Blue Bulls
4	Heteropogon Contortus	Kusal Grass	Sambar, Indian Gaur, Blue Bulls
5	Iselima Laxum	Moshan Grass	Sambar, Indian Gaur, Blue Bulls, Spotted Deers
6	Themeda Quadrivalvis	Ghonyad Grass	Indian Gaur, Blue Bulls
7	Setaria Pumilla	Ran Bajra	All soft fodder herbivores
8	Bothriochloa Tuberosa	Vaidy Grass	Sambar, Gaur, Blue Bulls
9	Iselima Prostratum	Moshan Grass	Sambar, Indian Gaur, Blue Bulls, Spotted Deers
10	Ischmemum Indicum, L. Rugosum	Ber – Lahan, Motha	Spotted Deers, Barking Deers, Indian Gaur



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