



HEREFORDSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

SPRING NEWSLETTER

(March 2014 to June 2014)

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Spring Talks and Events

March 2014

Small Mammal Survey Techniques and the Art of Tracking - Rob Strachan

Saturday, 22 March 2014 at Woolhope Village Hall, HR1 4QS

CANCELLED

April 2014

The 60th Spring Conference and AGM

4th to 6th April 2014 at Aston University, Birmingham

Contact: The Mammal Society at

<http://www.mammal.org.uk/conference>

Bat Box Check at Ast Wood

12th April 2014 at Ast Wood, Nr. Ledbury.

Contact: Denise Foster via website or Facebook

This is our first bat box check of the season. All bats found will be processed so please come prepared. Please bring a packed lunch. We also have a few bat boxes to install and a few other box repairs which should not take too long.

Bat Box Check at Lea and Pagets Wood

19th April 2014 at Lea and Pagets Wood, Woolhope

Contact: Denise Foster via website or Facebook

We currently have a colony of brown long-eared bats and a number of Noctules using this wood so there should be plenty of handling. Please bring a packed lunch.

Midlands Regional Bat Conference

26th April 2014 - Warwickshire College Trident Centre, Warwick

Contact: Bat Conservation Trust at

<http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/midlandconference.html>

May 2014

Herefordshire Woodland Bats Project starts again in May with at least 4 trapping events this month; 4th, 9th or 10th, 16th or 17th, 23rd or 24th May. We will be trapping in Haugh and Frith Woods again. Natural England have also approved 5 further woodlands in Herefordshire, Ast, Miner's Rest, Moorhouse, Mowley, and Old Country Wood. Details will be posted on the website and on Facebook.

June 2014

There will be plenty of activities during June including mammal recording surveys, dormouse

box checks, bat detector surveys and mist netting and harp trapping events for bats so please check the events calendar on the website.

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to also like to welcome the below new members to HMG as listed:

Ruth Allen, Richard Cook, Anton Kattan,
Mike Glyde

NEWS IN BRIEF

Herefordshire Mammals Group's New Logo

We only had one entry for our new logo which was disappointing. However, one participant entered 3 logos and the committee decided we could use all 3 designs (not at the same time) in some cases. Well done Louise!!



The Herefordshire Mammal Atlas is underway!

A preliminary meeting was held at the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC) on 20th January 2014. This meeting was attended by representatives from HMG, HBRC, Herefordshire Nature Trust (HNT) and Johnny Birks, who most of you know is Chairman of the Mammal Society and was recently involved in producing a similar publication, *Worcestershire's mammals*.

A timescale for the atlas has yet to be decided but it is expected to take about three years to complete. HBRC have kindly offered to produce initial maps for all our mammal species in Herefordshire. Once this has been done our task

then is to survey areas with no or few records and also to re-survey sites with older records. This is where our members can help.

We will be looking for volunteers to help with a whole array of surveys, from Longworth trapping to bat detector surveys, searching for harvest mouse nests and identifying road kill, analysing owl pellets and putting out dormouse tubes. We hope to be running free training sessions for some of these activities over the course of the next few years, but for now please keep sending us your records even if they don't seem interesting. Records of mole-hills and dead rabbits in the road are just as important as rarities such as Bechstein's bats and pine martens.

Another way you may be able to contribute to the atlas is by sending in good quality photos of mammals which will be considered for inclusion in the atlas (fully credited to you). Also good photos of road casualties, cat kills and footprints can be sent to us for identification. Please send your records with your contact details, a date and location either to our mammal recorder Felicity Burge at felicity.burge@mypostoffice.co.uk or direct to the Records Centre at hbrc@herefordshire.gov.uk.

We look forward to working with you all on this exciting project and hope to see you out surveying with us or at some of the training events in the future.

Press Release – From HAM to HMG

A press release was sent to a number of local newspapers and magazines to promote the Herefordshire Mammal Group's new rebranding. Please see below copies of articles that Ross Gazette and Welsh Border Life magazine printed.

The Hereford Times and Ledbury Reporter have also published our article. Laura Drake from the Mammal Society is also going to include the article in the New Affiliated Local Group's e-Bulletin.

Herefordshire Mammal Group

Group's ambitious new project

THE Herefordshire Mammal Group, formerly known as the Herefordshire Action for Mammals (HAM), is building on 15 years of recording local mammal populations, such as dormice, water voles, and bats to produce an atlas showing the distribution of mammals in the county.

In addition to the Herefordshire Mammal Atlas, the Group is currently working on another local project Herefordshire Woodland Bats Project. Both projects involve collecting mammal records and submitting them to the local HBRC which will help to determine the state of Herefordshire's wildlife. This is where local people could help. Submitting records to the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre for mammals observed is really useful, even it is a squirrel or rabbit. Interestingly the mole is an endangered species in Herefordshire as we have very few records in the county.

It is extremely important to conserve the ecosystems of our local mammals as their habitats are under pressure from farming practices, development and the recent weather. Herefordshire is still a very rural county with a diversity of mammal species. Higher predators that rely on them, like barn owls and kestrels, are seriously in decline so we have to consider providing habitats to support the smaller mammals for iconic species, like the barn owl, to survive.

The Herefordshire Mammal Group provides many varied winter talks, licence training for bats and dormice and survey training for small mammals and larger mammals, like otters and deer. They also provide habitat training which is useful for volunteers who have to provide habitat surveys for their projects. The Group supports other research groups like the Vincent Wildlife Trust, Bat Conservation Trust and the Mammal Society.

Anyone is welcome to get involved in surveying for mammals and if you would like more details, check out their website at <http://ham.btkc.co.uk> for more details. This is a great way to encourage a healthy lifestyle, getting plenty of exercise and fresh air.




• Robyn and Laura weigh a dormouse

Ross Gazette – 22nd January 2014

Herefordshire

Working under a new name, the Herefordshire Mammal Group (formerly Herefordshire Action for Mammals) are aiming to produce an atlas showing the distribution of mammals such as dormice, water voles and bats across the county, by surveying animal numbers. Members of the public can get involved by assisting with the surveys.

For more details, visit www.ham.btkc.co.uk



Welsh Borders Magazine March 2014 Issue

New Recording Software for entering Records – RODiS

RODiS which stands for Record Online Data input System is currently being piloted by the HBRC and a couple of HMG members. This new online recording system is easy to use and will be available for both ad hoc recorders as well as those who regularly enter records soon.

First Pine Marten Sighting in Herefordshire

A pine marten was spotted in Herefordshire late last year. Records of this sort are often questioned as they are not thought to be living in the county, but this sighting was made by a member of the Vincent Wildlife Trust who is an experienced pine marten surveyor with a good knowledge of the species.

Bats (and Swifts) in Churches Project

It is common knowledge how important churches are for both bats and swifts and in Herefordshire we have about 180 churches. This year we are hoping to pilot a new project, Bats (and Swifts) in Churches. To start this project we will be asking members to survey their own local churches. A project plan and training sessions will be organised in the near future.

If any HMG member has any information regarding bat or swift activity in their local church and is interested in surveying their local church please contact Denise Foster via the website or Facebook page in the first instance.

A training session will be given to members on surveying techniques, church architectural terms and collecting evidence at the beginning of May.

Tree ID – Twig and Bud Event in Lea and Pagets

Martin Hales guided a group of 8 HMG members and showed them how to identify trees in winter from twigs and buds. More than a dozen species of trees were keyed out and everyone in the group learnt something new.

This training was very valuable for those members who produce woodland habitat surveys for mammal work like the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme and other related research projects.

North Wales Serotine Bat Project - Review by Dave Smith



The January winter talk was another success. Sam Dyer gave a very interesting and informative talk on his self-funded project which has been running for three years now and is still ongoing. In 2010 whilst carrying out a commercial bat survey on a property, Sam started picking up what sounded like serotine bats foraging over a nearby playing field. As very few serotines have ever been recorded in Wales and this was over 100 miles north of the nearest known roost, he decided to investigate further. He began by questioning all the other bat ecologists in the area and asked to re-analyse their noctule recordings to see if any were in fact serotine (noctules were previously thought to be the only big bats in north Wales).

The following year he returned to the same site and recorded his suspected serotines again and tried back tracking to see where they were coming from with little success. At the same time he began to knock on people's doors in the area enquiring as to whether they had big bats roosting in their houses. One house owner said that they had had big bats in their roof but these bats had recently left, however Sam found some droppings on the path which he had analysed for DNA and they came back as positive for serotine. Finally he had proof!

Fast forward to a cold April 2012 and Sam invited friends over to stay with him for ten days of detector surveys and mist netting in the hope of trapping a serotine to radio tag.

Finally they caught a single parous female which took them straight to a roost within ten minutes. The roost was in an unlikely looking house with a gated drive which Sam had not enquired at before. Twenty one serotines were counted out of the roost, a second bat was hand netted and tagged. Fifteen days of radio tracking revealed they were only foraging for around an hour at a time within 1km of the roost and both bats spent considerable amounts of time in torpor in a nearby cliff face. One bat spent five days resting in the cliff.

In June of that year 26 serotines were recorded using the roost, at times sharing it with twenty five noctules. A PHD student joined Sam in June and took DNA from some of the bats and concluded that the roost was part of a distinct sub population un-related to other serotines living in the UK.

Another session of trapping and radio tracking took place in August 2012, this time the bats were foraging in a 4-5km radius of the roost and a smaller roost was discovered 6.5km from the main maternity roost, this was being used, both as a day and night roost. To date this is the only known group of serotines in north Wales and no other maternity roosts have been discovered. Sam is convinced that there must be more out there and is continuing his search this coming summer.

The Small Myotis Project – Review by Denise Foster



February's winter talk was given by Philip Brown, an MSc student from Bristol University describing his "Small Myotis Project" which took

place in 70 woodland sites in south-west and south-east England, and in the Midlands.

The aims of Philip's project are to determine the distribution, habitat use and dietary preferences of the 3 cryptic small *Myotis* species, whiskered (*Myotis mystacinus*), Brandt's (*M. brandtii*) and in particular the Alcahloe (*M. alcahloe*).

The Alcahloe was unknown until 2001 when it was first recorded in Greece and Hungary. It was later discovered across Europe with an official record in the UK in 2011 in North Yorkshire. It is similar to the whiskered and Brandt's bat with a considerable overlap of distinguishing features, so it is very difficult to identify in the hand. DNA taken from faecal material gives a more reliable identification. However, there were some spurious results from Philip's DNA analysis which should be considered, for example initial results from some samples were identified as wild boar, lemur, homo-sapiens and pipistrelle (which was actually a whiskered bat).

Philip compared woods that were either dry or close to water bodies greater than 0.5 ha in size. Two harp traps with acoustic lures were placed in the woodland interior and at the woodland edge. Droppings were collected from all small *Myotis* species caught, for subsequent DNA analysis.

A total of 395 bats were caught of which 39 were whiskered, Alcahloe and Brandt's (AKA WABS). Herefordshire woodlands surveyed included Chase, Old Country Wood and Lea and Pagets; all considered dry woods. A total of 19 bats were caught in Herefordshire but unfortunately no WABS. However four additional faecal samples were provided by Herefordshire and these were analysed and confirmed as whiskered bat which was a great relieve as this confirmed our identification.

A total of 127 samples were collected and sent for DNA analysis which included samples from both his surveys and from other independent bat projects.

Whilst some DNA analyses remains to be completed, Philip's results so far have confirmed the presence of Alcahloe in Surrey and Sussex (his study area didn't extend to north Yorkshire). However there is a tantalizing record of an

Alcahloe dropping collected in a commercial survey in south-west Worcestershire, but since its detailed location has not been revealed, Philip is unable to include it in his analysis.

Overall, the WABs that were caught in the proportions were whiskered 86%; Brandt's 10% and Alcahloe 5%. Surprisingly proximity to water did not appear to be a significant factor in the number of individuals caught for any of the species other than Daubenton's – however trapping did not commence until after civil twilight to avoid catching bats before they commenced foraging. Also results showed that Natterer's, Daubenton's and long-eared bats appear to prefer foraging in the woodland interior, rather than close to the edge.

Philip is now carrying out more detailed habitat modelling, with the aim of predicting the likely distribution of the three WAB species, which will inform future studies. In addition he is awaiting the completion of more detailed DNA analyses which will identify the invertebrate prey species taken by each bat. This dietary analysis should help to define the individual ecological niches occupied by the three species.

Philip gave us a very interesting and well-delivered talk, which was followed by a lively and extensive question and answer session. In addition to our own members, the audience included visitors from Monmouthshire, North Worcestershire and Shropshire, all of whom agreed that it was well worth the long drive!

Dormouse Co-ordinator Role for HMG by Ann Bowker



(Photo: courtesy of Denise Foster)

I have taken on the role of HMG Dormouse Co-ordinator from Mike Coleman on the assumption that, as I am retired, I should have more time on my hands.

I live in Malvern Wells on the side of the Hills and I first saw dormice locally in 2000 on the bird feeders in front of our kitchen window. Fortunately I had been on a number of PTES events and knew what I was looking at!

I trained for my licence with Hilary Smith at Dinmore and became a member of HAM. In 2006 she and I organised a tube survey of the Hills, helped and advised by a splendid group of people. I am the lead monitor on two of the three NDMP sites we now have on the Hills.

As my sites are in Worcestershire I have joined the Worcs Dormouse Group upon which some of my ideas for a Herefordshire group are based, as well as some excellent suggestions from Mike Coleman. I am a great believer in the value of sharing experiences and of seeing one's results in the context of what is happening in the local area as a whole, not to mention enjoying the company of like-minded people. What I would like to achieve in 2014 is to put together a list of people working for dormice in Herefordshire and then hopefully to organise a free get-together at the end of the season when we can meet friends, exchange information and review the year.

I suggest we work by email, though I will accommodate anyone without a computer. PLEASE, IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, WOULD YOU SEND ME AN EMAIL and I will set up a separate group in our email addresses and eventually circulate the list to everyone (unless you ask me not to include you). Could you tell me if you have a licence and roughly where you are 'dormousing.' I promise not to flood your in-box, (we have the NDMP group for that!), nor to pass on your details to anyone without your permission.

EVEN IF I KNOW YOU REALLY WELL, I should be grateful to receive an email rather than have to contact people individually. I need you to agree to join the group.

I share my email address with my husband which

can be confusing at first. The email address is mike.bowker@clara.net or telephone 01684 574079.

I think the group should include anyone doing dormouse work and should not be limited to members of HMG, nor to those with a licence, so do please introduce to me people whom you know in these categories if they would like to join.

Last year brought very mixed results for dormice. Let's hope they survive this incredibly wet winter and enjoy a better year in 2014.

Hedgehog Conservation in the UK by Emma Franks

"UK hedgehogs are declining at the same rate as tigers are globally." PTES survey results

This was the quote that made me sit to attention at the MaMoNet conference I attended recently (MaMoNet Conference Wales, 2014). UK hedgehog populations have experienced rapid declines in recent years, so much so that the hedgehog's status would be the equivalent to a 'red alert' listing in the bird world (PTES, 2013). There are believed to be a number of factors contributing to the decline in hedgehog numbers including; increased use of pesticides, removal and degradation of hedgerows, loss of permanent grass, habitat fragmentation and increase in road mortality. However help is at hand as conservation organisations are working together to identify the extent of the decline and how to reverse it.

The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) along with the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) have co-funded a hedgehog campaign to promote hedgehog conservation in the UK. The campaign involves raising public awareness, nationwide surveys, scientific research and training courses.



Radio-tagged hedgehog in Nottinghamshire (Sarah Blake)

Scientific research/ development

In 2010 I investigated the habitat preference of the hedgehog using radio-tracking techniques at Nottingham Trent University. My results showed that hedgehogs prefer grassland pasture and do not utilise arable fields. The PTES are continuing to fund hedgehog research at NTU and other universities, which will ultimately inform land management decisions to benefit hedgehogs.



My hedgehog research in Nottinghamshire

To combat habitat fragmentation PTES and BHPS are hoping to develop hedgehog friendly garden fencing with a company called Betafence. The fencing has a section of wire with holes large enough for hedgehogs to come and go, initial trials have been successful and it is hoped these

ideas will be promoted and considered in new-build developments nationwide (PTES, 2014).

At the MaMoNet conference a representative from the Cambrian Ecological Partnership discussed the success of using hedgehog footprint tunnels as a survey method for consultancies. Currently hedgehogs have no legal protection from development, the fact that consultancies are beginning to recognise the importance of surveying for hedgehogs is fantastic news.



Hedgehog footprint tunnel research in Nottinghamshire

Nationwide surveys/raising awareness

Long running surveys such as Mammals on Roads and Living with Mammals are run by the PTES and are already highlighting trends, both positive and negative, in mammal populations across the UK. The Mammals on Roads survey is now available as an app for smart phones.

Hedgehog Street is a campaign run by PTES and BHPS which encourages garden owners to create wildlife friendly features. The campaign will also improve habitat connectivity by encouraging communication between neighbours.

How you can get involved?

You can contribute to hedgehog conservation by taking part in national surveys via the PTES website or by becoming a hedgehog champion

through Hedgehog Street. You can also purchase a footprint tunnel from the Mammal Society and survey hedgehogs in your own garden. Don't forget to send your mammal sightings into the Mammal Group for our Herefordshire Mammal Atlas.

References & Useful links

People's Trust for Endangered Species (2013) *Hedgehog decline in UK urban jungle comparable to loss of world's tigers*. (Press release) Available online: http://www.ptes.org/files/2039_ptes_press_release_10_year_trend_analysis_jan13_final.pdf

[Accessed: 23/2/14] People's Trust for Endangered Species (2014) *Hedgehog Conservation in the United Kingdom*. (leaflet)

<http://ham.btck.co.uk/>

<http://www.ptes.org/>

<http://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/>

<http://www.mammal.org.uk/>

MaMoNet Hedgehog and Harvest Mouse Seminar Aberystwyth 15th February 2014 by David Lee

MaMoNet is a one-year Mammal Society project, running from April 2013 to March 2014, to develop a Mammal Monitoring Network in Wales, focussing on hedgehogs and harvest mice – species chosen since there are very few Welsh harvest mouse records and there has been an apparent severe decline in hedgehog population. The project objectives have been to collect baseline data in support of local BAP, build and train a network of volunteers and inspire public participation.

This excellent seminar was attended by about 80 delegates – mostly from Wales, but including several members of Herefordshire Mammal Group.

The meeting was opened by Marina Pacheco (Mammal Society CEO) who spoke about the importance of mammal recording and Becky Clews-Roberts (MaMoNet Wales Project Officer) who presented the aims and achievements of the project.



David Lee and Emma Franks at the MaMoNet Seminar

The first half of the day focussed mainly on hedgehogs, moving on to harvest mice in the afternoon.

Adam Grogan (RSPCA) reported studies of over-winter survival of rehabilitated hedgehogs, Results from RSPCA and other research groups – including mark/recapture and radio tracking - indicate that winter release back into the wild is very successful, with a high survival rate and low weight loss of recaptured animals. The minimum weight to survive hibernation varies around Europe, due to differing climatic conditions, and more information is required about pre-/post-hibernation weights of wild hedgehogs. However Pat Morris' estimate of 450g for animals in the UK appears to be about right and RSPCA advice is that animals weighing at least 500g will be fit to survive the winter unaided. Adam expressed concern that the Hedgehog Preservation Society's recommendation of a minimum weight of 600g may lead to animals being needlessly taken into care over winter.

Kate Williamson (Cambrian Ecological Partnership) discussed the use of Footprint Tunnels for Hedgehog surveys and whether they can be used for population monitoring as well as detection. Footprint Tunnels are a simple and inexpensive survey tool, available from the Mammal Society (kits only £10 each) and contain inked pads over which mammals are encouraged to walk – attracted by a hot-dog sausage bait – leaving footprints on sheets of paper as they pass through. They are particularly useful for

recording hedgehogs, whose footprints are very distinctive. When compared with conventional survey techniques, such as spotlighting and landowner questionnaires, the tunnels produced a larger number of records and detected Hedgehogs in areas where they were not found by other methods. Footprint tunnels are much less labour intensive than other survey methods and are suitable for use by volunteer groups but can be susceptible to livestock interference and poor weather conditions.



Henry Johnson (PTES Hedgehog Officer) gave an overview of hedgehog ecology. Radio tracking reveals a highly mobile species with a large average range (male 1.8km/32ha, female 1.1km/9.8ha). The best habitat is generally in urban areas due to reduced predation risks and increased food resources and shelter. The minimum viable population is believed to be 32 animals in an area of 90ha. Hedgehogs are widely distributed throughout the whole of the UK, with the exception of wetlands, moorlands and pinewoods. However there is strong evidence for recent decline (by 30% – 40%) both in rural and urban sites. Hedgehogs are highly susceptible to climate change, since mild winters are not good for hibernating species.

Penny Lewnes then discussed the controversial subject of hedgehog predation by badgers. The badger is one of the few predators able to tackle a hedgehog – either by forcibly unrolling it or else spearing it through its spines with its claws. However there have been very few authenticated direct observations of such predation. Whilst there is no conclusive evidence that badger predation is a major factor in hedgehog decline, Penny ably presented the evidence for the prosecution and the defence -

and left it up to us to decide whether we have a culprit or a coincidence!

Whilst hedgehogs can readily be identified from their footprints, other mammals passing through footprint tunnels present a much greater challenge and the morning was rounded off by Rob Strachan, who has recently carried out a study of footprints of captive animals, together with photographs of the animals' feet in order to generate "reference sheets". Rob's presentation was based on a quiz in which sadly I have to admit that at least two of our HMG delegates did not do very well at all, so we are eagerly looking forward to Rob's visit to Herefordshire in order to hone our identification skills!

Eloise Neighbour opened the afternoon harvest mouse session with a report that BioEcoSS Tube Traps are just as effective as the much more expensive Longworth traps. She went on to investigate the use bait stations to attract harvest mice to Bushnell remote cameras. Initial experiments using simple bait tables and commercial bird feeders led to problems with rats and wood mice respectively but she finally came up with a successful design based on a box made from 13mm-square weld-mesh, which excluded wood mice whilst providing easy access for harvest mice. It was astonishing to see the ease with which the harvest mice popped through the half-inch mesh! Harvest mice exhibited a preference for the bait stations over Longworth traps, when baited with sunflower seeds and dried mealworms.

There are very few harvest mouse records from Wales – only 139 since 1890 and fewer than 30 in the last 14 years. Records are scattered across lowland Wales, with very few above the 300m contour. Roy Tapping of the N Wales Record Centre (COFNOD) carried out a detailed analysis of the range of habitats suitable for harvest mice, based on Phase 1 and NVC data and grassland connectivity, within a 10km radius of the most recent harvest mouse records, in order to identify areas most likely to produce new records. Roy's results are now being used by the MISE project as a basis for ongoing nest searches.

Jenny MacPherson & Ceri Morris then described the harvest mouse work being carried out in

Wales within the MISE project (Mammals in a Sustainable Environment) - an EU cross-border collaboration between Eastern Ireland and West Wales, studying a range of mammal species including harvest mice and supported by DNA analysis at the Waterford Institute. Studies include a novel genetic technique using plastic pots baited with a millet/seed mix, set in pairs at ground and stalk level. All droppings are collected and the DNA analysed to species. This has proved to be an effective technique for detecting the presence of harvest mice, although its efficacy for low-density populations still needs to be established. As an alternative, barn owl and kestrel pellets are also dissected in volunteer workshops and DNA from fur samples analyzed, however there have not been any harvest mouse hits thus far.

Emily Howard-Williams, who is studying behavioural ecology and population dynamics of harvest mice following reintroduction to the wild, gave the final talk of the day, in which she described an assessment the use of PIT tags to estimate post-release habitat preference, dispersal and survival. Chipped harvest mice were monitored using an array of RFID readers in the release area, networked to a single data logger. No licence is required to chip the animals provided they are not anaesthetized and no post-implantation problems were encountered with any of the animals. Results have demonstrated the technique to be successful for post-release monitoring.



The Mammal Society Stand at the MaMoNet Seminar

The meeting closed with a competition for the best homemade footprint tunnel, which was won by a design based on recycled estate agents' "For Sale" boards!

WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK

HMG has a website which is updated with our news, details and also a library of pictures of our work and events. Please check it out at the link below.

<http://ham.btck.co.uk>

HMG also has an active Facebook page where we post all our events past and present. We currently have 68 members

<https://www.facebook.com/denise.foster.140#!/groups/222077991279736/>

HMG CONTACTS

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