

ALLIED FOR BIRDS

by Matt Reetz, executive director

Birds. Are. Awesome. Pretty much any time I give a talk, get interviewed on the radio, or just have a chat with folks, these three words (or some version of them) fly out of my mouth.

Birds are indeed awesome. It's just a fact. And it is such an honor, and a great privilege, to protect and celebrate them. Everything that our organization has ever done, and everything that we will do as Badgerland Bird Alliance is done to benefit birds, their habitats, and the people who enjoy them (and the people who don't yet know that they enjoy them). You, our members, make that possible.

Heck, this year has already been chock-full of all sorts of amazing work in advocacy, youth education, land protection, restoration, citizen science, special events, and so much more that you can read about in these pages. And yes, our name change was a big part of that—inviting more in our community to share in the joys of our work, ultimately making it more inclusive, sustainable, and effective. All to benefit birds.

There have been a lot of great things to celebrate. So, should we just kick back, relax, and rest on these laurels a while? No way! Lost time is never found again (thanks, Ben Franklin), and there is much more work to be done on the horizon. Wisconsin's amazing birds need all the support they can get. When our year-end appeal letter arrives in your mailbox in the next couple of weeks, I hope you will take the time to give it a read. And if you are inspired by the letter, or perhaps by all of the things we've achieved together, I hope you'll consider a gift.

Thanks for making our work . . . what's the word? Oh yeah, awesome.



Bird conservation, close to home.

Badgerland Bird Alliance is your southern Wisconsin Audubon chapter. Though we have a similar mission to protect birds, we are a distinct organization from National Audubon Society. By directly supporting Badgerland Bird Alliance or becoming a local member, you make a big difference for the birds and habitats you love right here in Wisconsin and beyond. Thank you!

A FITTING NAME FOR MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

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by Darcy Kind, member of the board of directors

When the board of directors began discussing our organization's name change, my mind immediately began visualizing the "Bird Names for Birds" lesson plan developed by our educators and taught to school groups.

This educational lesson points out that birds can be named for where they live or their behaviors or what they look like. Some birds might even sing or say their names—like a phoebe or a pewee. These names help to make the birds more recognizable to more people within any community, even to younger birders. When birds are named for someone, they are not given their due recognition as creatures that have much deeper importance beyond a person's name. The "Bird Names for Birds" lesson encourages kids to come up with new, more fitting names for these birds.

Likewise, I embrace our organization's name change, and I look forward to the continued and enhanced role that Badgerland Bird Alliance will have in our community. No longer does our name exist as a barrier to some, but rather, serves as a beacon to invite all to participate in the important work of bird conservation.

Together, we will protect more birds. Together, we will restore and steward more land for critical habitat. Together, more kids and more people of all ages will share in the joys that birds bring each and every one of us. The future looks bright.

"Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!" sings the bird in my backyard, and I think that makes a fine name, too.

Learn more and watch our name announcement video at madisonaudubon.org/new-name.



WHAT'S THE STORY WITH THE AMERICAN KESTREL?

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by Brenna Marsicek, director of communications & outreach

American Kestrels are incredible. They're the smallest falcon in North America, charismatic, beautiful, and fierce. They are also a species in need of help, and the focus of one of our strongest citizen science programs.

Although driving through southern Wisconsin frequently results in a number of "kestrel!!" sightings (often perched on power lines with prey in their talons), the species is in decline. Data from the North American Breeding Bird Survey show that kestrel populations are down by a staggering 53% since the 1960s. At this rate, they'll lose another 50% of their current population by 2075.



Why? Scientists can't find a single reason for it, but rather point toward a multitude: loss of nesting habitat, fewer grasslands to hunt in, increased insecticide and rodenticide use, climate change, and more. But one significant possibility has to do with grasshoppers.

In a June 2023 New York Times article called "The Mystery of the Vanishing Kestrels," Catrin Einhorn tracks the work of ornithologists studying the birds. They hypothesize that first-year kestrels rely heavily on catching insects—easier prey than the typical rodents, snakes, and lizards. So, good kestrel habitat needs grasslands filled with insects and larger prey, and places to nest. We're working hard on both fronts.

Our Kestrel Nest Box Monitoring Program, led by volunteer extraordinaire Brand Smith, worked with over 100 volunteers this year to monitor 223 nest boxes, 78 (34%) of which were occupied by American Kestrels. Those boxes fledged 294 kestrels—since 2012, 1,906 nestlings have taken flight from our boxes! Each of those first-years (and many kestrel adults) are banded to facilitate additional research around kestrel ecology and population dynamics.

Our kestrel nest boxes are placed in desirable habitat: grasslands abundant in insects. Nest boxes are sited on private property, on public property owned by the WDNR or US Fish and Wildlife Service, on Ho-Chunk tribal land, and on properties stewarded by conservation organizations, including 15 boxes at our own sanctuaries.

This program offers an exciting future for kestrels! We couldn't do this work without the amazing help from our volunteers and partners. Thank you for all you do to support kestrels and all other native birds and habitats.

BALANCING THE CAREFUL CONTROL OF CATTAILS

by Penny and Gary Shackelford, Fair Meadows volunteer land managers

Late summer to early fall is cattail season. Surveys in 1992 and 2005 found that the sedge meadows at Fair Meadows Sanctuary had scattered or loose stands of cattails amid a diverse community dominated by tussock sedge, lake sedge, and blue-joint grass. In late summer, we looked forward to the intense purple of swamp thistles, the lovely cream shades of turtlehead and cream gentian, and a background of white shining aster and common boneset interspersed with clumps of pink and purple New England aster.

The emergent marsh vegetation was dominated by water sedge, lake sedge, common bur-reed, marsh skullcap, wild mint, arrowhead, sweet flag, and blue flag (wild iris). Scattered throughout were the spikes of hard-stem and soft-stem bulrush.

In addition to native broad-leaved cattails (*Typha latifolia*), both surveys noted the looming presence of narrow-leaved (*Typha angustifolia*) and hybrid cattails (*Typha x glauca*). Native cattails have been beloved symbols of wetlands, home to many birds and fish, and a food source for Native Americans and early settlers. But the aggressive narrow-leaved cattails from Eurasia have invaded the wetlands of North America and hybridized with the native cattails, overwhelming them and crowding out all other native plants.

Over the past ten years, we watched a gradual increase in cattails in the wetlands of the sanctuary, ending with a seeming explosion until some areas had a solid wall of cattails. Native species were pushed to the periphery or were hanging on as tiny remnants. This was true aggression!

After consulting with several specialists in wetland restoration and doing some experiments on our own, we settled on a method of control using cut-stem treatment with an herbicide approved for aquatic use—imazapyr.

On dense stands, we use a brush cutter with a chisel tooth blade to make a clean cut. We treat the cut stems using a low-pressure backpack sprayer with a sponge tip to directly apply a small amount of chemical. This approach is time-consuming but very targeted, with minimal damage to surrounding native vegetation. In the densest stands, we have seen suppression of native plants for one to two years, followed by excellent recovery of the previous suite of native plants. The before-and-after is striking!



10,000 MONARCHS AND COUNTING. . .

by Mark Martin, Susan Foote-Martin, Emma Raasch, & Graham Steinhauer; Goose Pond team

This year was our 12th year tagging, and together, we reached a major milestone. Between Goose Pond Sanctuary staff, volunteers, and partners, 10,445 total monarchs have been tagged since 2012!

The 2023 monarch tagging season began on August 22 and ended on October 2. Last fall, only 320 monarchs were tagged at Goose Pond, but this year, we tagged 815 total. Within the first five (of nine total) field trip sessions, we had already broken last year's record. Jim Otto, Goose Pond volunteer and insect enthusiast, tagged 212 by himself! Partners also tagged another



247 at other locations, meaning we cumulatively tagged 1,062 monarchs migrating through south-central Wisconsin.

Weather greatly impacted our numbers. The first field trip day was cloudy and windy—we ended up catching and tagging only 50 monarchs. We quickly learned that the monarchs were seeking shelter on scattered shrubs in the prairie rather than nectaring in the open. However, the second field trip day was sunny and calm, helping us to catch and tag 250 monarchs.

Monarch tagging is an excellent way to connect people of all ages and backgrounds with nature. Goose Pond staff hosted nine monarch tagging sessions: six for Badgerland Bird Alliance, two for Natural Resources Foundation, and one for Discovery Charter School. In total, 80 children (as young as five years old) and 151 adults (as old as 90 years old) visited Goose Pond to learn about monarch butterflies and to assist with this important citizen science effort. Jerry Martin (age 90) was pleased to be able to release eight butterflies. Thank you to everyone who assisted with tagging monarchs this fall!

On October 3, Susan Foote-Martin was using her field glasses to watch a Sandhill Crane calling and flying high in the air. Just below, she spotted three monarch butterflies heading south. This was a first for Sue, who imagined that they were at such a high altitude that they could probably see Mexico in the far distant horizon. Safe travels!

by Roger Packard, Faville Grove volunteer land manager

As the leaves drop, the landscape at Faville Grove Sanctuary, already open, rolling, and inviting, spreads wide. Late fall and winter are great times to experience this beautiful part of the state and get a feel for how it appeared under previous (i.e., Native American) stewardship. Check out the full trail maps on the tearout page to the right, and come out to explore. Here are suggestions—two short walks and a day hike—to get you started:

Lake Mills Ledge Trail (0.8 mile)

From the kiosk on Prairie Lane, this short walk through diverse prairie and savanna restorations takes you to the southeastern-most exposure of the vein of quartzite bedrock that appears west of this site in the Baraboo Hills and at scattered sites across southern Minnesota, and ends at the falls in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The Ho-Chunk camped among these rocks, drank from the springs below the ledge, hunted the expansive floodplain prairie to the east, and fished in the Crawfish River.

MacKenzie Overlook Trail (0.5–1 mile)

Park on the north side of Highway 89 and walk through the mowed grass of the old farmstead (Buddy's Place) to find two trailheads, with the trail to the right being longer. Either way, you'll walk through the Isthmus Black Oak Savanna and uphill to the MacKenzie Overlook. To the east, across the marsh, lies the new 80-acre parcel just added this fall. Take in the 360-degree vista of dry prairie and floating bog, nearly as far as the eye can see.

West Sanctuary Trek (6.5 miles for full loop)

Start either at the south end of the sanctuary at the grassy pull-off along North Shore Road, and make your way north through the North Shore Moraine up to Buddy's Prairie and points north, or start at the gravel pull-off at the east end of Hillview Lane, and work your way south. Either way, an extra loop around the Kettle Pond is well worth the hike.

For more information and maps, visit madisonaudubon.org/faville-grove.



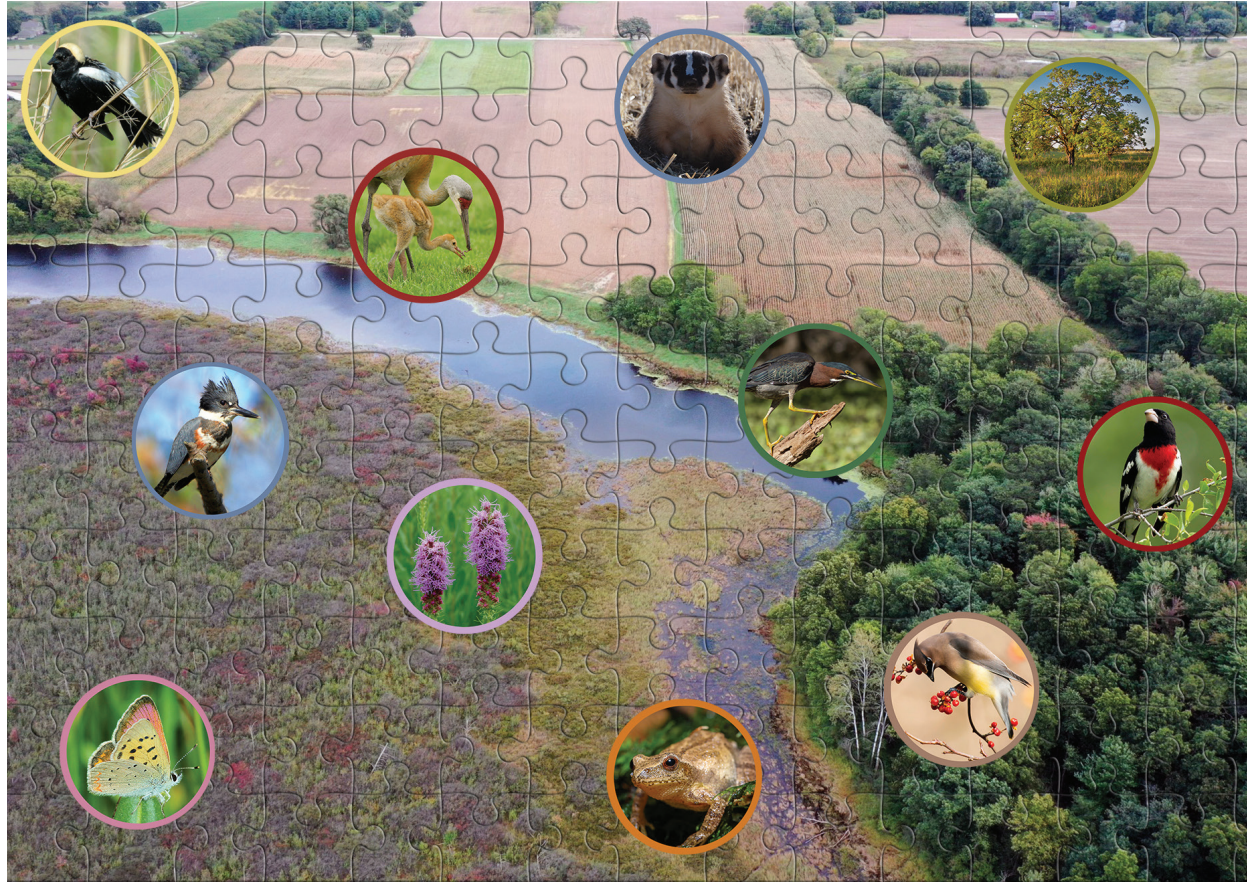
We are pleased to welcome Tucker Sanborn as our new Faville Grove Sanctuary resident land steward!

As a southern Wisconsin native, he has a long-held love for the varied natural spaces of his home state. When you see him in and around Faville Grove's prairies, wetlands, or woods, introduce yourself and he will no doubt share his enthusiasm for nature and his new position.

THANKS TO YOU, WE DID IT!

by Becky Abel, director of philanthropy

With your help, the Faville Grove Sanctuary landscape puzzle is completed, and on October 17, Badgerland Bird Alliance became owner and steward of the new 80-acre parcel!



Our dedicated supporters and land

protectors contributed more than 80 donations ranging from \$10 to \$100,000, allowing Badgerland Bird Alliance to nearly refill our land acquisition coffers that were depleted with this large purchase. You've strengthened our position to respond quickly when the next, high-priority land acquisition opportunity arises.

Badgerland Bird Alliance will rent out the cropland for a couple of years while controlling invasives around the perimeter before restoring this important area to native prairie. Once restored, this parcel will expand habitat for area-sensitive grassland birds, protect water quality, and create high-quality habitat for a diversity of wildflowers, pollinators, birds, and other critters.

Thank you to all who made this critical land purchase possible, and an extra special thank you to our lead donors: Jenni & Kyle Foundation, Roma Lenahan, Phoebe R. and John D. Lewis Foundation, Marcia MacKenzie, David Musolf & Roger Packard, Lynne & Peter Weil, Mareda Weiss, and some very generous anonymous supporters.

We encourage all Badgerland Bird Alliance members, and especially our puzzle donors, to visit Faville Grove Sanctuary to see the new property and to hike the beautiful trails!

For a complete list of donors, visit madisonaudubon.org/puzzle.

by Carolyn Byers, director of education, and Mickenzee Okon, educator

At the beginning of each school year, we have a few lessons that help ease kids into outdoor learning. We practice playing easy games. We build routines. We talk about ecology basics like habitats and predator-prey interactions.

This year, we are also starting the school year with four new lessons about Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). These lessons are based on chapters in the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. In a 2002 article for *BioScience* titled “Weaving Traditional Ecological Knowledge into Biological Education,” Kimmerer defines TEK as: “rational and reliable knowledge that has been developed through generations of intimate contact by native peoples with their lands . . . having equal status with scientific knowledge.”

Thinking about TEK helps us talk with kids about how to approach people with kindness and curiosity when they have different worldviews—there are many ways to think about science and nature! And it also shows us that words are important. What we say influences how we and others think, and eventually how we feel and act. Starting with this framework early fosters a new perspective and mindset for kids to explore together all year long.



Kindergarteners learned about the language of gratitude. We read a book together about Thanksgiving Address: an Indigenous practice of thanking nature and one another for all of the ways they support us. Our kids worked on finding and expressing their appreciation for nature. This will continue throughout the school year as we end each lesson with a gratitude circle.

Our third graders thought about how word choice conveys either respect or disrespect. In English, we use “he/she/they” when talking about people and often use “it” when talking about non-human animals and plants. Many Indigenous language speakers refer to parts of nature in the same respectful way that they speak about their families, because nature IS family. Instead of “it,” Kimmerer suggests using *ki* (pronounced “key” and short for *Bmaadiziaki*, the Potawatomi word for an earth being). Our kids practiced speaking this way, and will continue all year! “The squirrel is up in the tree. *Ki* is holding a nut!”

Our older kids thought about how our words impact others. Fourth and fifth graders learned more about some of Kimmerer's research projects, and also the discrimination she faced from professors both as a student and as a professor herself.

Our fourth graders learned about Kimmerer as a student. She was one of the first female and Indigenous students at her college. When her professors asked why she wanted to study plants, Kimmerer said she wanted to know why asters and goldenrods look so beautiful together. Her professors told her that way of thinking was wrong—it "wasn't science." She was heartbroken, but later learned that it IS science! Asters and goldenrods are complementary colors (purple and yellow) that our eyes are very good at detecting, and our brains respond strongly when we see them.

Our fifth graders learned about Kimmerer as a professor. She was helping a graduate student study traditional Indigenous ways of harvesting sweetgrass. Though her colleagues thought it was a poor research topic, Kimmerer and her student used TEK to explore differences in methods for harvesting sweetgrass, and in the process, illuminated long-understood native knowledge about the plant.

These newest lessons from Robin Wall Kimmerer are just the latest in our ever-growing collection about leading scientists, naturalists, and environmentalists of color. We share with students amazing lessons about bears by Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant, meet lizards with Dr. Earyn McGee, and continue the discussion on how words matter with Bird Names for Birds.

We are having fun, all while getting a few big messages front and center. If kids have lots of experience in nature, we want to help them learn how to actively make space for AND support kids who have less experience. And if they're kids of color, we want to tell them loudly and often that they belong. Nature is there for all of us.



Our education program is possible thanks to support from the Caerus Foundation, Theda and Tamblin Clark Smith Family Foundation, and Jenni & Kyle Foundation.

THE GIFTS OF NATURE

by Becky Abel, director of philanthropy

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'Tis the season of giving thanks, and of giving gifts.

Badgerland Bird Alliance board and staff are thankful for all of our members and supporters, who know that some of the best gifts don't necessarily come in big OR small packages—they're feathered, furry, scaled, petaled gifts from nature.

Birds and natural landscapes offer gifts 12 months of the year, year after year. Will you give them a gift in return? Your donation will help the birds you care about and will give you the knowledge that you are making a difference.

Join the NEW Conservation Leaders Giving Circle

Badgerland Bird Alliance has launched a new Conservation Leaders Circle to celebrate donors who give \$1,000 or more each year. Conservation Leaders will receive invitations to a special event with our executive director, Matt Reetz, and the president of our board of directors; an annual guided bird walk at a Badgerland Bird Alliance sanctuary with Matt and stewardship staff; and special recognition in the annual report.

Make a year-end gift for birds: How about a dollar a day?

Soon, you'll receive a mailing from Badgerland Bird Alliance asking for your support. This year-end drive is important for making our year-round work possible. Your dollar-a-day \$365 donation supports high-quality programs and land protection. Any donation that's right for you—\$5 or \$500 or your chosen amount—goes straight to bird protection.

Give a birdy membership

Do you want to encourage a budding naturalist or share your love of birds with a friend or loved one? Give a gift membership to Badgerland Bird Alliance—your recipient will gain early access to activities, classes, and trips for all ages; the Badgerland Bird Alliance newsletter; and more.

Soar as a frequent flyer

Did you know that recurring donations are better for birds and easier for you? Frequent Flyers are members like you who have committed to making regular, ongoing donations to support our work together. As a Frequent Flyer, your donations can be automated based on how often, how much, and from which account you'd like to contribute. By joining this flock, you help Badgerland Bird Alliance balance revenue throughout the year, reduce fundraising expenses, and, quite simply, use less paper—all while celebrating and protecting amazing birds!

More information about joining the Frequent Flyer flock at madisonaudubon.org/frequent-flyers.

Plan a future gift for birds

You can protect the local birds and landscapes you love during and beyond your lifetime by including Badgerland Bird Alliance in your will or estate plans. Your legacy gift helps ensure that future bird choruses remain diverse and that beautiful local sanctuaries offer permanent protection for native species. Legacy gifts can include cash, stocks, other appreciated assets, and more. Speak with your financial advisor about leaving a planned gift to Badgerland Bird Alliance, or contact Becky Abel at 608-255-2473 x5.

If you have already named Badgerland Bird Alliance (or Madison Audubon) in your estate plans, please let us know. We'd love to welcome you to the Kestrel Legacy Circle.

Leverage your employer's matching gift program: Free money for birds!

Many companies offer matching funding to their employees' favorite nonprofits. But only 7% of donors at companies with those programs apply for donations—80% have never even heard about their company's matching gifts!

Whether matching financial donations or volunteer service hours, we have members who have secured thousands of dollars in gifts for bird conservation through employee service and giving programs. Check your employee handbook or talk with your personnel manager to learn whether your company has a charitable giving program.

Make a gift distribution from your IRA: If you're age 70½ or older

You probably know that tax law requires you to take payouts from your IRA. Did you know that you can give a tax-free gift to birds as part of your required minimum distribution and that it will be excluded from your gross income? Your gift must be transferred directly from your traditional or Roth IRA to Badgerland Bird Alliance. Instead of being taxed as regular income, your donation goes directly to birds, and you receive a tax benefit. Talk to your financial advisor, or call our office for more information.

**Give a gift of stock**

Donating stock can be a simple way to help birds. Just provide your broker or financial advisor with Badgerland Bird Alliance's stockbroker information, and your gift transfer will be taken care of. Learn more at madisonaudubon.org/other-ways-to-give.

Checks may be made out to either Badgerland Bird Alliance or Madison Audubon. For more information about giving, contact Becky at 608-255-2473 x5 or babel@madisonaudubon.org.

Thank you! Your commitment to birds and conservation is incredible. We are grateful to all of our supporters at all levels, but due to space constraints, donors are listed on our website: madisonaudubon.org/2023-donors

UPCOMING EVENTS

To register and find detailed information about upcoming field trips, events, and adult education offerings visit madisonaudubon.org/events

Want to get involved? Join one of our upcoming citizen science programs:

- Bald Eagle Nest Watch: madisonaudubon.org/benw
 - Kestrel Nest Box Monitoring: madisonaudubon.org/kestrels
 - Christmas Bird Count: madisonaudubon.org/cbc
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PHOTO CREDITS

P1: Greater Prairie Chickens by Grayson Smith/USFWS Midwest

P2: Black-capped Chickadee by Courtney Celley/USFWS Midwest

P3: American Kestrel perched on wood by Mick Thompson

P4: Aggressive cattails before and after targeted control by Gary Shackelford

P5: Monarchs on yellow blooms in the prairie by Mike Budd/USFWS Midwest

P6: Tucker Sanborn portrait photo, courtesy of Tucker.

P7: Puzzle illustration by Brenna Marsicek/Badgerland Bird Alliance

P8: A child using binoculars by Mickenzee Okon/Badgerland Bird Alliance

P9: A child draws in their nature journal by Carolyn Byers/Badgerland Bird Alliance

P10: Northern Cardinal illustration by Kaitlin Svabek/Badgerland Bird Alliance

P11: Blue Jay illustration by Kaitlin Svabek/Badgerland Bird Alliance

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