

# the ROADRUNNER.....



newsletter of the

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 9655, El Paso, TX 79986

March 1981

Editor: John Sproul

Volume 11, Number 3

## CALENDAR

### GENERAL MEETING

MON. 16 MARCH 1981, 7:30 PM, Garden Center, 3105 Grant St., in Memorial Park. TNC IN TEXAS. Nature Conservancy Secures Gypsum Dunes...TNC Acquires Barrow Ranch Next to Anahuac Refuge...Conservancy Launches \$3.5 MM Campaign to Save Texas Hill Country...Nature Conservancy Announces National Critical Areas Conservation Program. The Nature Conservancy is active throughout the U.S. and has been especially so in Texas lately. This private nonprofit conservation group uses its resources to protect ecologically significant natural areas and their dependent wildlife. It maintains the largest system of private sanctuaries in the U.S. The Conservancy has parlayed rigorous research, sound business practices and a commitment to maintaining a healthy environment into 1 of the most respected conservation organizations going.

What has The Nature Conservancy accomplished in Texas? We'll find out 16 March. Not only will we see a slide show on TNC's preserves in Texas, but a Texas Chapter board member will be on hand to field your questions. Not just any board member, but Ed White, who with his wife Geth will come over from Alpine. The Whites long played instrumental roles in our Audubon chapter; come out and visit with some old friends.

### THE BIRDATHON IS COMING

Our May Big Day Count (2 May) will have a new twist in 1981: it will be part of the 1st annual Audubon Birdathon. In this

Can't make this meeting? The same program, minus Ed and Geth, will be given at the Sierra Club general meeting, Wed. 25 Mar, 7:30 PM, St. Paul's Methodist Church, 7000 Edgemere. #

### FIELD TRIPS

SUN. 8 MARCH. FT. BLISS PONDS. Meet at 7:30 AM at Furrow Building Materials (Fred Wilson at Railroad). You can bird this area from your car. We should see waterfowl and shorebird species, plus a few surprises. Leader: Jane Fowler (772-0296).

SAT. 21 MARCH. AGUIRRE SPRINGS. Meet at 6 AM at the blue spire in Sunrise Shopping Center, 8500 Dyer. Pack a lunch. You can walk the 4-mile Pine Tree Trail or a shorter route. We should see a variety of montane and woodland birds, including Acorn Woodpecker, Steller's and Scrub jays, Plain Titmouse and Bushtit. Leader: Joe Guinn (566-8438).

SAT.-SUN. 4-5 APRIL. CLAY MILLER RANCH. #

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MON. 9 MARCH, 7:30 PM. The Board will meet at the home of Jane Fowler, 8212 Parkland, El Paso (772-0296). We will discuss our chapter's priorities for 1981-82. All members are welcome. #

nationwide fund-raising event, bird counters will solicit pledges from sponsors, who agree to contribute some stated amount

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for each bird species the counter identifies on count day. Our chapter, the Southwest Regional Office, and National Audubon each get 1/3 of what we raise. Tentatively, our 1/3 will go towards a habitat enhancement project at Feather L.

Nationally and regionally, prizes will go

to the top money-raising individuals and chapters and to the counter spotting the most species. Locally, we'll award prizes to the persons raising the most money, gaining the most sponsors and finding the most species. All counters and sponsors will be eligible for a drawing for a Grand Prize. Full details next month. Plan to participate as either a counter or sponsor. #

#### 1981-82 OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

If enthusiasm counts for anything, El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon should have a good year. Some 36 people agreed to help with our committees. I thank you all. /John Sproul/

President	John Sproul*	545-5157	Library	Joe Lykins	562-3821
Vice-president	Al Gavit*	852-3119	Membership	Jo Warolin*	533-8731
Sec./Treas.	Jane Fowler*	772-0296	Program	Peggy Heisel	821-0989
Conservation	Tony Worth*	592-4926	Publications	John Sproul	545-5157
Education	Kris Kohlhoff*	581-3565	Publicity	Jo Nagel*	566-2143
Field Trips	Jeff Donaldson*	755-2455	Sanctuary	Al Gavit	852-3119
Finance	Jane Fowler	772-0296	Audubon Council of Texas Delegate		
Hospitality	Peggy Heisel*	821-0989		Helen Barto	755-4744

\* - Board of Directors

#### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

In keeping with last month's promise, I'm going to use this space to discuss the identification problems inherent in certain groups.

Let's start with hawks. Hawks present numerous problems in field identification. There are several reasons for this. They are extremely variable (polymorphic) in plumage, with most species showing both light and dark phases. Immatures of most species are basically the same in general plumage, being brownish above, with a variable amount of streaking or barring below. Hawks are often seen perched, which does not allow the observer to distinguish wing form and pattern, not to mention flight characteristics. To top it all off, the field guides have in many cases oversimplified the identification of certain species.

With these things in mind, let us consider some specific problems. Dark-phase birds seem to present the most problems to many birders. In our area, dark-phase Red-tails are the most commonly seen dark

hawks. There is much individual variation, with body and wing-lining color ranging from rusty brown to deep chocolate. Almost all dark Red-tails can still be identified by light-colored primaries (which contrast with the wing linings) and a tail which usually shows some degree of pinkish to orange coloration. Even when the tail is whitish there should not be any evidence of a dark sub-terminal band. The Harlan's race of the Red-tail exhibits a dark phase, too, but should be identified in this area only with extreme caution. The Harlan's Hawk is usually dark brown on the body and wing-linings, with contrasting whitish primaries and tail. The tail shows a dark sub-terminal band which is not well-defined or cut-off at its anterior border. Harlan's usually show a variable amount of white spotting on the dark breast and back, but this may be present in other dark Red-tails too.

Swainson's Hawk is often reported in our area in winter. Although it is the common nesting hawk of the desert, it is migratory and is not found here in winter.

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2-The Roadrunner

All winter sightings must be viewed with suspicion, as there are very few confirmed winter records for the U.S. The dark phase of the Swainson's Hawk is very rare and seldom seen at any season. They lack contrast in the wings and show fine zonations in the tail.

Dark-phase Ferruginous and Rough-legged hawks are similar in plumage, with the primary difference being the tail. This shows a distinct terminal band in the Rough-leg, while the tail of the Ferruginous is entirely white. The Ferruginous is more likely to be seen in El Paso, but not in its dark phase, which is rare. The Rough-leg is uncommon in winter and shows a whole range (or cline) of plumage variation, from the typical white phase to the typical dark phase. Be aware that intermediates exist. The hovering flight

often displayed by Rough-legs may be helpful in identifying them.

Finally, Black Hawks and Zone-tailed Hawks are not found in our immediate vicinity, especially in winter. If you think you have 1 of these, look again. The Black Hawk has a very broad wing and looks more like an eagle or Black Vulture in flight. Be aware that young Golden Eagles are dark with white tail bands and white marks at the wrist, just like the Black Hawk. The Zone-tail is much more like a Turkey Vulture when seen flying. It exhibits the same 2-tone effect to the underwing, as well as the dihedral flight pattern, and the tail bands are hard to see at a distance.

More about hawks next month. /Kevin Zimmer/

#### OBSERVATIONS - 29 January to 25 February 1981

##### HERONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

Green Herons were at their usual spot at Randel's Pool 2/8 (BB) and 2/14 (JD). A Black-crowned Night Heron was at Diez Lagos 2/7 (SJD,RA). The lone White-faced Ibis was still at Feather L. 2/20 (JG, et al.). Some 23 Cinnamon Teal in the upper valley 2/19 (SJD,RA) was a good concentration, and a single Snow Goose at Santa Teresa 2/14 (JD) was slightly offbeat. Top honors for waterfowl during the period go to 3 Wood Ducks (2 males, 1 female) at a small pond off Country Club Rd. 2/7-8 (SJD,RA,m.ob.):

##### HAWKS THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS

Golden Eagles continue to attract attention, with numerous sightings throughout the period (SB,JD,KZ). Single Prairie Falcons were along Newman Rd. 2/1 (JD,KZ) and McNutt Rd. 2/16 (JD). The pair of Ferruginous Hawks (present since December) were still at Santa Teresa as of 2/14 (JD). Other sightings for this species include 1 near Randel's Pool 2/8 (m.ob.) and 1 near Newman 2/12 (JD). A dark-phase Rough-legged Hawk near Santa Teresa 2/16 was unusual (JD). A single Gambel's Quail was near Apache Springs 2/21 (m.ob.).

They are seldom seen in the mountains away from residential areas. White-throated Swifts have wintered in good numbers, with many flocks reported throughout the period (JD). Short-eared Owls were sticking tight in n.e. El Paso, with 2 on 1/31 (JD,JF,JN,JS) and 4 on 2/12 (JD). On the latter occasion 1 of the owls drove off a Red-tailed Hawk. A Burrowing Owl was at Santa Teresa 2/15 (JD). The only hummingbird reported was a female Black-chinned in Mtn. Park 2/13 (JB).

##### PASSERINES

A Green Jay in the lower valley 2/3 (GR) was most likely an escaped bird. House Wrens were reported from the upper valley in good numbers (m.ob.). A Hermit Thrush near Randel's Pool 2/8 was unusual (m.ob.). It has been a good winter for robins, with 100 along Country Club Rd. 2/7 (SJD, RA) and large flocks in n.e. El Paso throughout the month (JD). Mountain Bluebirds were reported twice, with 6 in n.e. El Paso 2/6 and 15 at Santa Teresa 2/14 (JD). Western Bluebirds and Cedar Waxwings were reported on several occasions from all over town (m.ob.). A Phainopepla near Apache Springs 2/21 was of interest

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(BJ, et al.). Black-tailed Gnatcatchers were surprisingly common on the mesa w. of the Organ Mtns., with 12 in a single arroyo there 2/25 (JD,KZ). A single bird in the Franklin Mtns. 2/4 (JD) was more unusual. Most astounding was a well-described immature NASHVILLE WARBLER in n.e. El Paso 2/24 (PH). This represents either a 1st wintering record for the area or an extremely early migrant. The other warbler of note was a Common Yellowthroat at Randel's Pool 2/8 (PH, et al.). Also in the very unusual category was an immature oriole in Janet Brockmoller's yard 2/11. White-throated Sparrows con-

tinued to turn up at Durling's Farm, with 3 there 2/8 (DT, et al.). A Fox Sparrow at Randel's Pool 2/8 (JF, et al.) was exceptionally good.

OBSERVERS: Ruby Allen, Steve Bilbo, Bob Bleicher, Janet Brockmoller, Sarah Jane Dodds, Jeff Donaldson, Jane Fowler, Joe Guinn, Peggy Heisel, Bob Johnson, many observers (m.ob.), Jo Nagel, Gerald Retzer, John Sproul, Dennis Taylor, Kevin Zimmer. (Report observations to Kevin Zimmer, 5115 N. Mesa #A-226, El Paso 79912; 581-0665.) #

#### FIELD TRIPS FOLLOW-UP

On a breezy 31 Jan, 19 participants turned out to view the inhabitants of Arroyo Park. Seen were 3 accipiters, Rufous-sided Towhees, a flock of 30 White-winged Dove, a Verdin and a very interesting House Finch with yellow displacing the standard red markings. Species total: 16.

The 8 Feb trip to Randel's Pool and Durling's Farm had 15 participants. A total of 51 species was seen, including 5 species of hawks. Near Randel's Pool we found Common Snipe, a Hermit Thrush, a female Common Yellowthroat and a Fox Sparrow. A private pond on Country Club Rd.

hosted 3 Wood Ducks. Three white-throated Sparrows were the bonus for those who continued on to Durling's Farm.

On 21 Feb, despite cool, windy weather, 20 people gathered at the Wilderness Park Museum before proceeding to nearby Apache Springs. En route, we saw sizeable flocks of Lesser Goldfinch, Rufous-sided Towhees and Black-throated and Brewer's sparrows; a male Phainopepla; and a Red-tailed Hawk and Golden Eagle soaring over a ridgeline to the west. We saw 25 species on an enjoyable trip. /Jeff Donaldson and Jane Fowler/

#### LOOSE FEATHERS

##### CHAPTER BUDGET APPROVED

At its 9 Feb meeting, the Board of Directors approved with 2 revisions the chapter budget published last month. The revisions: 1) allocate \$75 to defray travel expenses of delegates to Audubon Council of Texas meetings and 2) include the birdathon (see pgs. 1 and 2) as an additional source of income. #

##### EDITOR SEARCH CONTINUES

If you hurry, you can still apply for the coveted job of ROADRUNNER editor. Though the hours are odd and the pay miserly, the benefits are fantastic. Call John Sproul (545-5157 H, 543-6126 W) for details. #

##### WILDERNESS POW WOW

Going to be in east Texas in early April? Considering attending the Texas Committee on Natural Resources' annual wilderness Pow Wow, 4-5 Apr at Indian Mounds in the Sabine Natl. Forest (near the TX-LA line). Indian Mounds is 1 of 10 small areas that east Texas conservationists are plugging for Wilderness designation. Pow wow'ers will be discussing this conservation issue and others of statewide interest. Last year over 400 people attended the Pow Wow. For more information contact John Sproul (545-5157) or TCONR, 4719 W. Lovers Lane, Dallas, TX 75209. #

## RUMMAGING AROUND

We need rummage sales to help fund chapter activities, and for successful sales we need your unwanted items. Our next sale is slated for May, so start saving now. Especially needed are kitchenware, other houseware, and tools. Deliver your discards to Peggy Heisel (821-0939), Joe Guinn (566-8438) or Jane Fowler (772-0296) or arrange to have 1 of these people pick them up. #

## AUDUBON ON THE AIR

TV stations 4, 7 and 9 are now broadcasting Audubon public service announcements. Should you see 1, let Jo Nagel (566-2143) or John Sproul (545-5157) know, so we can keep track of our air time. Also let us know if you hear our general meetings announced on KSET's Community Notes. #

## ANY PACKRATS OUT THERE?

Our chapter collection of ROADRUNNERS is incomplete. If you have old ROADRUNNERS you no longer want, we will take them. Specifically, we need all of Volumes 1 (1971), 2 (1972) and 3 (1973); plus Vol. 6, No. 7 (Nov 1976). If you can donate issues of the original ROADRUNNER, published in the 1940s by the El Paso Bird Study Club, or even loan them to us for copying, you will be enshrined in the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Gallery of Stars. Contact Joe Lykins (562-3821) or John Sproul (545-5157). #

## ADDRESS CHANGE

The Texas Nature Conservancy has moved its offices from San Antonio to Austin. The new address: Texas Nature Conservancy, 503-B E. Sixth St., Austin, TX 78701 (512/479-0301). #

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The ROADRUNNER is sent to all members of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society. Non-members can subscribe for \$3 per year. Mail payments to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso, TX 79902. Make checks payable to El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society.

Deadline for the April ROADRUNNER is 25 March.

## FREEBIE AVAILABLE

Commercial birdseed mixes don't always contain what wild birds like to eat. Learn more in "Relative Attractiveness of Different Foods at Wild Bird Feeders" by Aelred D. Geis. Single copies are available free from: Publications Unit, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington, DC 20240. Ask for SSR-Wildlife 233. #

## BIRDING ETHICS

Birders should act thoughtfully towards birds, avian habitat, fellow birders and the general public. The Sacramento Audubon Society has just revised and updated its Birders' Code of Ethics. For a copy, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to National Audubon Society, 555 Audubon Place, Sacramento, CA 95825. #

## AUDUBON INSTITUTE OF DESERT ECOLOGY

The Tucson Audubon Society is staging its 11th annual Audubon Institute of Desert Ecology, 9-13 May, at the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum 110 miles north of Tucson and 60 miles east of Phoenix in the northern Sonoran Desert. The Institute brings together 60 participants and 6 scientists/educators for field investigations into all aspects of desert ecology. The fee is \$170 for a 4-day program, \$200 for 5 days. Interested? Contact Mr. James Olmstead, Director, AIDE, 30-A N. Tucson Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85716. #

## EL PASO AREA CHECKLIST

If you don't have yours yet, our field checklist for birds of the El Paso area is available at the general meetings or from Elza Gilboe, 1305 Oakdale, El Paso, TX 79925 (772-1942). Price: 5¢ each for El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon members, 15¢ each for nonmembers. Provide a stamped self-addressed envelope for mail orders of 10 or less. #

## CONSERVATION

### THE HARRIS' HAWK IN THE EL PASO AREA

(Editor's Note: Last month John Caraway described his early experiences with the Harris' Hawk, including nest searches in the lower valley in the early 1960s. This month he concludes his 2-part series with a report on the decline of the local Harris' Hawk population. He gives his views on reasons for the decline and on steps needed to reverse it.)

I found 15 active Harris' Hawk nests in the El Paso area in the early 1960s. What is their status today? Three longtime nest areas have been totally destroyed by land reclamation. Such habitat loss is part of the problem, but still much suitable habitat remains. The greater problem is persecution. For example, at a McNary site inhabited by 2 extremely wary and successful adult birds, the section of tree containing the nest was broken off last summer. Fellow falconer Gary Starr and I found the nest on the ground and both adults missing.

I want to stress here that it is not falconers who decimate the Harris' Hawk numbers. Young, inexperienced would-be falconers probably have accounted for a very small fraction of the total population loss. Dedicated falconers have a deep, enduring, usually fanatical love for raptors--almost incomprehensible to most people. They are not about to "dirty their own bed!" And almost to the man, they have a blind hate for those that do--the indiscriminate gunners, the "slob" hunters.

From the falconers' standpoint--and the hawks'--there are simply too many guns. The types of people with guns, and their motives, are as varied as people themselves. Many a young hunter, proudly showing a freshly-killed hawk to a longtime duck-hunter father, has had his parade rained on by the comment, "Damn it, if you can't eat it, don't kill it!" Unfortunately, between this youngster with supervision from a dedicated sportsman, and the sportsman himself, lie

millions of unsupervised, unconscionable "sometime hunters" who drive endlessly over the countryside shooting everything that moves.

In this area, any large buteos--especially the tame, unsuspecting northern Red-tailed Hawks--unfortunate enough to pick the Horizon pole row for a wintering site have but a few minutes to a few hours to live. Back in 1974, an old female Prairie Falcon, a sometime visitor to the far end of the pole row, was lucky; she made it for nearly 10 days. In 1976, one of a pair of Golden Eagles lived less than 2 hours. I saw the 2 Goldies and later found the body of 1, minus tail and feet.

Each spring a few Harris' migrate into this area. They settle in the same limited habitat used in years past by other birds. Year after year I have found 1 or both of the adults shot dead near the nest tree, dead chicks in the nest, and the following spring there would be a new pair of hopefuls, back in the area, using the same nest, and almost invariably with the same tragic results.

One can only speculate on the reason for the relentless persecution of the Harris'. And the timing. In most cases the pairs were successful to the point of having 2- or 3-week-old chicks before destruction. In some cases the young were fledged, only to be shot when they began branching to nearby pole rows.

From the original 15 nests of the 1960s, only 2 were active for the last 3 years, with only 1 or 2 young produced. Inexplicably, in 1980 pairs or singles moved into 10 of the known sites. Gary Starr and I found dead birds at 8 of the sites, and 1 other pair disappeared from the nest area shortly after the birds were seen copulating. Strangely, many months after the disappearance of this pair, 3 birds were observed back at the nest site! An educated guess would be that the pair moved for some reason to a nearby area, fledged a young bird and moved

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back to the more suitable habitat. Although none of the known nest sites have been invulnerable to destruction, this site (near Acala) has been 1 of the most successful of all for bringing off young --to the point where they actually start hunting on their own.

All of the ranchers with Harris' on or near their land have been wonderfully friendly and cooperative, and none allow indiscriminate hunting--but the destruction continues.

Only concerted effort--education, law enforcement, a determined people-to-people program--can sustain the pitifully few remaining breeding Harris' in this area. My heart aches for all of those gorgeous birds--totally tame, totally unsuspecting--that have moved into available habitat, year after year, only to have their young destroyed, or be destroyed themselves--or both.

I do know that I cannot, alone, save them. I welcome the assistance of anyone willing to help. /John Caraway/

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yes, I want to join the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Chapter of National Audubon Society.

name .....

address .....

city ..... state .... zip .....

phone .....

Membership category desired:

\_\_\_ Individual/\$20    \_\_\_ Family/\$25

\_\_\_ Sr. Citizen, Individual/\$13.50

\_\_\_ Sr. Citizen, Family/\$15

\_\_\_ Student/\$13.50

This is a \_\_\_new\_\_\_ renewal membership.

Make checks payable to National Audubon Society. Mail to Jo Ellen Warolin, 1406 N. St. Vrain, El Paso, TX 79902.

PROGRESS FOR NONGAME WILDLIFE SLOW IN TEXAS AND NEW MEXICO

The federal Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980 encourages states to develop and implement programs for all wildlife. In view of this new national commitment to "nongame" species, how are nongame programs in Texas and New Mexico faring?

Texas has had a nongame wildlife program since 1973, but it is a shoestring operation, budgeted at \$130,000 this year. Funded from general revenue, the program hasn't had a significant funding increase since it was created. Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. (TPWD) wants that to change. TPWD expects increased emphasis on nongame wildlife management in the 1980s and is seeking substantial budget increases for nongame in 1982 and 1983.

The Legislative Budget Board recently gave the legislature a proposed budget well below what TPWD is seeking, but the wildlife agency has requested an amendment to its budget that would restore a significant portion of the cuts. If TPWD's request is approved, nongame wildlife will have a brighter future in this state. You can help by contacting Rep. Bill Presnal (House of Representatives, P.O. Box 2910, Austin, TX 78769), chair of the House Appropriations Committee, and Sen. Grant Jones (Texas Senate, P.O. Box 12068, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711), chair of the Senate Finance Committee, and asking that their committees approve TPWD's full budget request.

New Mexico doesn't even have a nongame program. Its Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) would like to start 1, but agricultural interests have killed every attempt so far. They fear a nongame program would diminish their ability to control wildlife that causes agricultural damage (read coyotes). This year, NMDGF and NM Department of Agriculture (NMDA) put together a watered-down bill designed to appease agricultural interests. When even this bill met resistance, NMDA withdrew its support. Conservationists then proposed a stronger bill. In late

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February, the New Mexico Senate Conservation Committee rejected that bill unanimously. New Mexico conservationists will regroup and try again.

What about the federal nongame program? The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act authorizes \$20 million over 4 years to be distributed to states to develop and implement nongame programs. That's "authorize," not "allocate." No nongame monies have been allocated yet. Given the budget-cutting efforts of the Reagan administration, don't count on any of that money becoming available soon. /John Sproul/

#### RECYCLING

The next pick-up date for recyclables in El Paso is Wed. 18 Mar. Have your newspapers, waste paper and cans at curbside by 7:30 AM. #

#### MEMBERSHIP

Audubon's 6-month membership campaign ends 31 Mar. We don't have the latest figures yet, but we hope our chapter is still contending for 1 of the prizes. If you are contemplating joining or giving a gift subscription, please do it now, not a month from now. If you get a renewal notice, please don't put it aside until after you've done your tax return.

There is another reason to join now or renew now even if your membership is paid for the year. It's not good news, but you deserve to know. According to a recent memo from Russ Peterson, President of National Audubon Society, "a dues increase on July 1, 1981 seems inescapable." The proposed new rates: Individual/\$25; Family/\$32; Sr. Citizen, Individual/\$17; Sr. Citizen, Family/\$19; Student/\$17. Isn't inflation wonderful? #

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