



Chaparral Naturalist

A Publication of
Pomona Valley Audubon Society

www.pomonavalleyaudubon.org

SPRING 2025

Bird Flu on the Rise in California

By Scott Marnoy, M.D.

In December, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency after 300 dairy herds tested positive for avian influenza H5N1, commonly known as bird flu, over the preceding 30 days. Across the U.S., more than 60 people have been infected with avian influenza H5N1 following agricultural exposures. An individual in Louisiana was hospitalized and died from the first severe case of bird flu following exposure to backyard poultry flocks that tested positive for avian influenza.

What is the connection between birds, cows and human beings? How does bird flu impact human populations? It was avian influenza H1N1 that led to an estimated 50 million deaths worldwide in the final year of World War I.

To understand the connection to avian influenza, some basic biology is needed. The designation H5N1 is a “handle” to describe two different proteins on the surface of the virus that can be used to categorize influenza viruses. The body’s immune system recognizes those proteins and in time can mount an immune response directed at viruses that bear that protein. The problem is that mutations arising spontaneously or acquired from other viruses can result in new proteins expressed on the surface that allow the virus to escape the body’s immune surveillance. Thus, new flu vaccines are needed every year to address the specific variant that will dominate that season.

To cause disease, a virus first needs to enter the cells of its host, be it animal or human being. Most of the time, bird viruses are specific to birds and human viruses to humans. However, a gigantic genetic lottery can occasionally allow a bird virus to enter a new host. Still more mutations have to occur to permit that virus to spread from individual to individual so that in the case of humans, an exposure to sick birds is no longer necessary to become infected.

Conditions that promote this sequence of events are found where crowded markets house caged poultry, wild birds and animals such as swine in the same location.

Swine, for instance, can harbor both avian and animal viruses

in their windpipe tissue. This creates a living petri dish where one virus can acquire mutations from another and become a super pathogen – a bug that causes severe disease.

Wild birds migrate and in doing so they provide the vehicle for the spread of

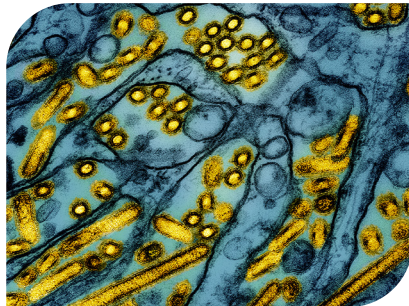
influenza. Genetic spread of Eurasian strains of avian influenza has been traced to birds migrating from Europe through Iceland, Greenland and then to Newfoundland. Genetic testing has implicated turnstones and knots among other birds in this route of virus dissemination. Ducks and geese in the Atlantic Flyway have further spread avian influenza.

Wild birds most affected by avian influenza tend to be colonial nesters including gulls, terns, gannets, alcids and skuas. Again, viruses need nearby neighbors to spread. Vultures and birds of prey can acquire disease by attacking sickened prey.

Starting in 2021, a highly pathogenic strain of H5N1 avian influenza spread among domestic fowl, forcing farmers to euthanize more than 148 million chickens, turkeys and ducks in the U.S. It has also prompted some countries to vaccinate poultry. Cattle in California may have become infected with the virus after being exposed to wild bird excrement where they are fed. The virus could be transmitted in raw milk.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NIAID



Colorized transmission electron micrograph of avian influenza A H5N1 virus particles shown in yellow. Photo courtesy of CDC and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

What can I do?

- Report bird mortalities to your state wildlife management agency immediately so that bird die-offs can be investigated and tested for avian influenza.
- Prevent contact of domestic or captive birds with wild birds.
- Do not handle sick or dead wildlife. If it is necessary to do so, wear impermeable gloves, wash hands with soap and water, and change clothing before having contact with domestic poultry or pet birds.
- USDA has maintained that bird feeders do not pose a risk with respect to avian influenza unless in proximity to poultry. However, they can transmit other pathogens and should be kept clean.
- Consult current guidelines from County of Los Angeles Public Health: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/HPAI.htm>
- Most importantly, the CDC broadly recommends yearly vaccination for individuals over 6 months of age for influenza. Your physician can address your individual risks and benefits.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL FARIVAR

2024 Morro Coast Birding Trip Report

By Tina Stoner, PVAS President

Seventeen PVAS members met at the base of Morro Rock at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, November 16. The air was crisp and exceptionally clear with no fog to obstruct the view of the high surf crashing over the breakwater. Playful sea otters kept us entertained as we parked our cars and waited for everyone to arrive. After some introductions we began looking for birds including the famous Peregrine Falcon pair that call the rock home. One falcon made an early appearance in flight overhead and everyone got a good look. An assortment of wrens, sparrows, and phoebes were seen at the base of the rock while gulls, cormorants, grebes and Common Loons were spotted on the water before heading north.

In the area of the Cayucos Pier, Surf Scoter and Greater Yellow legs were observed but not the species we were expecting like turnstones and Surfbirds. Their rocky surf habitat was underwater thanks to the extra high tides. Stopping a little further north yielded our only Black Oystercatchers of the weekend.

Our next stop was selected to take advantage of the maximum high tide of the month. In years' past, Nelson's Sparrow (formerly Sharp-tailed) was a rare but regular visitor to Morrow Bay. Although it had not been recorded on eBird for a couple years, we crossed our fingers hoping the high tide would flood the vegetation in the salt marsh, forcing the bird to forage closer to where it had been historically seen from the Morro Bay Marina boardwalk trail. Unfortunately, no Nelson's Sparrow was spotted, but the high tide did bring in large numbers of wading and shorebird species like egrets, herons, sandpipers, Willet and Marbled Godwit.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL FARIVAR

A large flock of Brant awaited us at Morro Coast Audubon's Sweetwater Spring Nature Preserve along with Blue-winged Teal, Northern Flicker, California Quail and more. After a great outdoor lunch on the patio of the Clubhouse Grill at Sea Pines Golf Club we headed for Montana de Oro State Park. Our destination was the Bluff Trail with its combination of coastal sage and rocky cliff habitats and beautiful views of Morro Rock to the north.

One surprise in Montana de Oro was the large number of mule deer grazing and bedded down very near the trail. Flying over them was a Northern Harrier that hovered in the costal wind making only the slightest changes in its wings to maneuver without flapping. It was another raptor -- a White-tailed Kite -- that

entertained us on our way back to Morro Bay via Turri Road by eating its prey while hovering in flight.

On Sunday morning it was time to say goodbye to Morro Bay. An Osprey with a large fish landed on a streetlight as we headed for points south starting with the Pismo Monarch Grove. The count figures at the visitor's trailer told the story of Monarch population decline. We saw only a few butterflies, but the birding was good, and Townsend's Warblers ruled the day.



PHOTO BY ERIC SMITH

At the Oceano Campground at Pismo State Beach we were greeted by a Red-shouldered Hawk on a solar panel in the parking lot that posed cooperatively for everyone with a camera or cell phone. On the lagoon trail we listened to Marsh Wrens, Wrentits and a Sora while scanning the trees for Hutton's Vireos, Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Fox Sparrow. Near the water's edge, Great Blue and Black-crowned Night Herons and a Southwestern Pond Turtle (a threatened species) were seen while Gadwall and Ruddy Ducks floated nearby.

Oso Flaco Lake was our final stop on Sunday. Blue-Grey Gnatcatchers welcomed us on the trail as we walked to the lake. The boardwalk over the water provided great views of several species of ducks including Cinnamon Teal and Lesser Scaup. On our walk to the ocean, a Myrtle's Yellow-rumped Warbler showed off near the boardwalk. Once at the surf's edge, Sanderlings ran on the beach while squadrons of Brown Pelicans flew overhead. After enjoying the vast expanse of beach the area is famous for, we walked back to the parking lot, enjoyed our picnic lunches and said our goodbyes before going our separate ways.

Sometime on Sunday, participant Conny Grant said to me, "Just when I thought I've seen it all, it keeps getting better."

My thanks to Sally Bird, former PVAS member who now lives on the Central Coast, for helping me scout the trip on Friday and joining us on Saturday. Very special thanks to Eric Smith for being our birding leader and to Matt Thomas for being our eBird recorder. The final tally for six stops of Saturday and four on Sunday was 109 species of birds and over 2,100 individuals observed.

Birding in Glendora's Big Dalton Canyon

By Patrick Gavit

Big Dalton Canyon is a quaint natural area in the city of Glendora nestled at the base of the San Gabriel Mountain foothills. The canyon is bisected by Big Dalton Canyon Road, which begins at the intersection with Glendora Mountain Road and proceeds all the way to Big Dalton Canyon Dam, however pedestrians are not allowed to walk that far.

The canyon is home to several plant communities including riparian, oak woodland, and chaparral that entice many birds at all seasons. While the elevation ranges from 1,100 to 1,500 feet along the canyon road, birds that more typically occur at higher elevations sometimes forage in the canyon including Steller's Jays, Hairy Woodpeckers, Mountain Chickadees, and Mountain Quail.

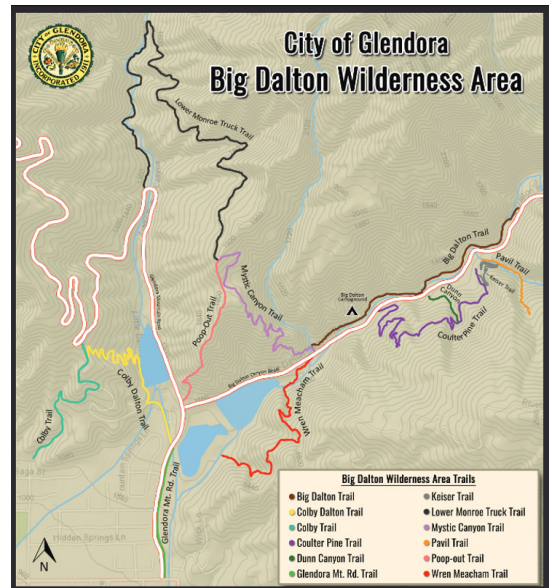
I particularly enjoy walking through the canyon at night. The calls of Great Horned Owls and Common Poorwills resonate through the canyon and with good fortune, either or both species can be seen. I was once able to track down a Western Screech Owl after I heard its call. I found it handsomely perched on the branch of an oak tree in my flashlight beam. I was even able to capture an image with my cell phone. I have also been close enough to obtain cell phone images of Great Horned Owls and Common Poorwills. A Saw Whet Owl is a rare possibility. Take care to avoid stepping on Southern Pacific Rattlesnakes that warm themselves on the road at night during the warmer months.

There are several options for birding in the canyon. The easiest option is to walk along the paved canyon road up to the second or third gate and return the same way. The road roughly parallels Big Dalton Canyon Stream and traverses riparian, oak woodland, and chaparral habitat.

An assortment of bird species are year-round residents including Rufous Crowned Sparrows and Canyon Wrens. During breeding season, Rufous Crowned Sparrows like the south facing slope on the north side of the canyon road in the first 0.3 miles. They can also be found at the top of the sediment placement site much farther up the canyon. While Canyon Wrens can be seen and heard anywhere in the canyon, two areas where they commonly occur are near the stone cabin about 0.25 miles from the start of the road and near the amphitheater about one mile farther up the canyon. The song of the Canyon Wren, consisting of a long series of descending notes, is a welcome interlude to a quiet hike in the canyon.

In April and May, migrating warblers, vireos, flycatchers, and other passerines can be seen feeding on insects along the riparian corridor. During and after migration, there is always a possibility of a vagrant bird showing up in the canyon such as in May 2024,

when a Tropical Parula was present for three days. A Northern Waterthrush was documented during fall migration in September 2020, and a Painted Redstart was present during the two winter seasons of 2006 and 2007.



Trails in Big Dalton Canyon

There are three gates along Big Dalton Canyon Road that control vehicle and pedestrian traffic in the canyon. The first gate is 0.1 miles from Glendora Mountain Road and prevents vehicle traffic into the canyon at certain times. The exact time the gate is opened and closed each day varies but is approximately at sunrise and sunset. Pedestrians are allowed past the gate even when it is

closed. Make sure your vehicle is out of the canyon in the evening before this gate closes for the night. The gate attendant will usually drive up the canyon to inform visitors that the gate will be closing. Gate number two is about 1.2 miles from Glendora Mountain Road and is normally always closed. Employees or others with business at Big Dalton Canyon Dam can open the gate but no other cars can proceed further. Pedestrians can, however, walk past this gate and continue up the canyon. The third gate is 1.7 miles from Glendora Mountain Road and can also only be opened by vehicles going to the dam. No pedestrians are allowed past this gate and thus

this is a turnaround point for a hike up the canyon.

Parking is generally easy and available, with dirt-pullout parking spaces, and parking along the road available in some areas. Between Glendora Mountain Road and the first gate, I do not recommend parking on the north side as the steep cliff above the road is prone to rockslides. Further up the canyon between the first and second gate there are several unpaved lots that can accommodate many cars.

Patrick Gavit lives in Glendora and has been observing animals in Big Dalton Canyon for the past 12 years and specializes in snakes (see <https://www.glendorawildlife.com/snakes>).



View of Big Dalton Canyon Road leading up the canyon

PHOTO BY PATRICK GAVIT

Meetings

PVAS meetings take place at 7 p.m. in the Padua Room of the Alexander Hughes Center at 1700 Danbury Dr. in Claremont, generally on the first Thursday of each month from September through June.



Thursday, March 6, at 7 p.m.

Dr. Allison Schultz – “Flashy Feathers to Microscopic Mechanisms: How and Why Birds are Colorful”

Join Allison Schultz, Associate Curator of Ornithology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, as she delves into the world of feathers and their colors, discussing how different forces have shaped the multitude of colors and patterns that we observe today. She will conclude her talk with an example of how environmental pollution is impacting bird feathers.

Dr. Shultz received her PhD from Harvard University, MS from San Diego State University, and BA from the University of California, Berkeley. Her website is <http://allisonshultz.com>.



Thursday, April 3, at 7 p.m.

Jennifer Chebahtah, “Building a California Native Garden for Birds”

Jen Chebahtah, horticulturist with the California Botanic Garden, will introduce us to the basics of gardening with California native plants. Then dive deeper as together we will use a blank slate “yard” via slideshow and build a landscape plan from scratch with specially selected California native plants that support birds throughout the year. Audience members can build their own garden using dimensions of their own home garden space.

In her role as a horticulturist at Cal BG, Chebahtah takes care of about six acres of native plants. She received her bachelor’s degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from UC Santa Cruz.



Thursday, May 1, at 7 p.m.

Dr. Suzanne Thompson - “Protecting Burrowing Owls in the Pomona Valley: The Story and Fate of the Ontario Airport Owls”

The PVAS Burrowing Owl Project fought for years to protect 200 acres of prime owl habitat east of the Ontario International Airport. When the fight was lost and the fields destroyed, what happened to those owls? PVAS’s own Suzanne Thompson will reveal their fate, including both the promising and the less encouraging prospects. Also, Emmy-Award winning filmmaker Ann Kaneko will introduce and screen her short documentary film, “Operation Owl,” which focuses on the fight to save the owls’ habitat.

Suzanne Thompson received a PhD in Psychology from UCLA and is Emerita Professor of Psychology at Pomona College.

See www.pomonavalleyaudubon.org for full details of presentations and presenter bios.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY (NAS) AND POMONA VALLEY AUDUBON (PVAS) MEMBERSHIP

We invite you to become a member of both NAS and PVAS. You also have the option of joining just PVAS. For either option, a yearly individual or family membership is \$20.

Check one:

- JOIN Join both NAS and PVAS ONLINE..... On the PVAS website, click on “Membership” and then on link to NAS. Make a \$20 donation to NAS. Check Chapter Code: C08
- Join both NAS and PVAS BY CHECK. Make out a \$20 check to NAS. Mail to NAS with address slip below.
- Join PVAS only, not NAS. Make \$20 check to PVAS and send to PVAS with address slip below.
- RENEW Renew your joint membership in NAS and PVAS ONLINE. . . Use the renewal notice you receive from NAS or make a \$20 donation to NAS on the NAS website. *Use the same name as your membership.
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NAS mailing address: **NAS, PO Box 97194, Washington DC 20090**

PVAS mailing address: **PVAS, 2058 N. Mills, PMB 426, Claremont, CA 91711**

Name _____ Chapter Code C08

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Field Trips

You have the option to meet at Memorial Park in Claremont and carpool or caravan to the site or you can meet us at the site.

Saturday, March 15

Field Trip to The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens and Vicinity

47900 Portola Ave, Palm Desert. Easy to Moderate. Option to hike some of the garden trails.

View spring migrants and desert dwellers alike. Meet at Memorial Park, Claremont at 6:15 a.m. or at the Zoo at 7:45 a.m. Anticipate a full day of birding so bring lunch, snacks, ample water and appropriate clothing for desert conditions. Admission \$39.95. Estimated round trip driving distance is 190 miles. Contact Trip Leader: Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

Friday, April 11

Field Trip and Survey of the North Etiwanda Preserve

4890 Etiwanda Ave, Rancho Cucamonga. Difficulty: Strenuous (Hiking 3.5 miles over rocky, uneven terrain with 800+ foot elevation gain.) Moderate option to survey the southern edge of the park.

Specialties include Bell's Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, and other open-country species. Meet at Beryl Park at the West Parking Lot, 6501 Carnelian St. for a 7 a.m. departure to the preserve. Please bring sturdy footwear, lunch, water, snacks, and layered clothing for about 6 hours in the field. Please RSVP with Trip Leader Mike Brossart mjbrossart@gmail.com

Saturday, April 19

Field Trip to Huntington Central Park

18002 Goldenwest St., Huntington Beach. Difficulty: Easy to moderate.

This park has attracted more than 300 species of waterfowl, raptors, migrants and vagrant species. Meet at Memorial Park, Claremont at 7:00 a.m. Anticipate a full day of birding so bring lunch, snacks, ample water and appropriate clothing. Estimated round trip driving distance is 80 miles. Contact Trip Leader: Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

Saturday, April 26

Field Trip to Prado Wetlands with David McMichael

14980 River Rd. Corona. Moderate (up to 4 miles).

Orange County Water District biologist, David McMichael will conduct a private tour of habitat for wading shore birds, waterfowl, raptors, and the endangered Least Bell's Vireo. Trip limited to

12 people. Contact trip leader Tina Stoner at 909-292-3900 or tinastoner@earthlink.net to reserve your spot by the April 21 deadline.

Saturday, May 3

Field trip to Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

11055 East Dr, Morongo Valley, CA 92256 – Difficulty: Moderate (up to 4 miles but optional feeder watching only)

A desert oasis at the height of western migration with lots of local nesting activity too. Meet at 6:00 a.m. at Memorial Park in Claremont (Note earlier start time!) We'll also visit Covington Park next door. Bring snacks, water and lunch for a full day trip. Estimated round-trip driving distance is 167 miles.

Trip Leader: Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

Saturday, June 7

Field Trip to the Big Bear Lake Area – (multiple locations)

Difficulty: Moderate to Strenuous (up to 4 miles)

Enjoy birding the Big Bear Lake area and Bluff Lake during the breeding season of montane species. Meet at 6:00 a.m. at Memorial Park in Claremont (Note earlier start time!). Bring snacks, water and lunch for a full day of birding. Estimated round-trip driving distance is 150 miles.

Trip Leader: Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

Sunday, July 13

Looking for Black Swifts at Claremont Hills Wilderness Park

Difficulty: Strenuous (one mile hike on fire road with steep grade, possible high heat)

Park at the south lot at the corner of N. Mills Ave. and Mt. Baldy Rd. Parking is \$9 for four hours for non-residents, free for Claremont residents. Walk north on Mills Avenue to meet at the gate at 5:00 p.m. Be prepared with ample water, insect repellent, sunscreen and sturdy shoes. RSVP to Tom Miko at tgmiko@gmail.com.

Monday, August 4 – Friday, August 8

Save the date! Dan Gregory will be leading a trip to Southeast Arizona. Details will follow on the PVAS website.

Bird Walks

First Sunday of the Month Family-Friendly Bird Walks at the California Botanic Garden

1500 N. College Ave. Claremont

Meet at the entrance at 8:00 AM for free admission. This family-friendly bird walk is approximately 2 hours long and is perfect for beginners and experienced birders alike. No binoculars? No worries! Loaner binoculars are available (limited number so first come first served.) You will receive instructions on their use as well. PVAS volunteer Ken Burgdorff (gwrencaps@gmail.com) and others will lead the walks. Please RSVP using the Botanic Garden's reservation site (<https://www.calbg.org/events-programs/events>) by using the date-specific links for each month.

Dates: March 2, April 6, May 4 and June 1

Fourth Sunday of the Month Bonelli Bird Walks

Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas -

Difficulty: Moderate

Enjoy one of the richest birding sites in Southern California! We meet in the parking lot of Brackett Field Airport/Norm's Hangar Coffee Shop, at 1615 McKinley Ave., La Verne. Meet at 7:45 a.m. to caravan into the park for free entrance and an 8:00 a.m. walk lasting two to three hours. Don't forget your binoculars and comfortable shoes.

RSVP with leaders for desired date:

March 23: Tina Stoner tinastoner@earthlink.net or 909-292-3900

April 27: Keith Condon catbird117@yahoo.com

May 25: Patrick Gavit ebiner.gavit@gmail.com or 626.214.6905



Pomona Valley Audubon Society
2058 N. Mills Ave., PMB426
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Annual June Meeting and Party

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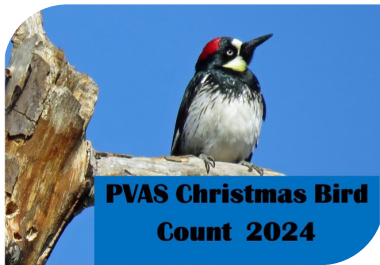
Food, Elections, Flock Leader Award,
Silent Auction and Beautiful Photography
by your fellow chapter members

Thursday, June 5

Social Hour 6 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Meeting 7 p.m.- 9 p.m.

PVAS CHAPARRAL NATURALIST | SPRING 2025



By PVAS Vice President Seth Thompson

'Twas the week before Christmas, Saturday, December 14, and all through the area 60 PVAS volunteers were conducting the 2024 Christmas Bird Count. More than 700 Audubon chapters in the United States and Canada pick one day from mid-December to early January to conduct a census of birds in their area, identifying species and counting individuals. In December we recorded 125 species, down from 133 species seen in 2023. In 2024, volunteers saw 8,000 individuals in our counting area, markedly fewer than the average number seen in most past years.

There is no obvious explanation for the decline. As every birder is aware, sometimes you see them and sometimes you don't. There were 15 species seen in 2023 that were not seen this year; but seven species spotted this year that were missed last year. And once again, living the good life on their favorite wintering grounds, Yellow-rumped Warblers were the most common bird in the survey.

A special shout out goes to Sheila White who takes care of getting our data into the National Audubon database and maintains the historical record of our counts.

You can view the full results at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/302233>.



One bird count team heard – but did not see – nine Great Horned Owls at 5 a.m. in San Dimas Canyon.

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kathleenamc@yahoo.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR - Sam Atwood - twoatwoods@gmail.com

Hey Photographers!

PVAS's annual Photo Showcase lets you show off 10 to 15 of your favorite shots at the June 5 meeting. Enter your best picture of a bird or birds feeding in the Photo Challenge. Deadline for submissions to Seth Thompson at polpsych@gmail.com is May 20. See the full details on the website <http://pomonalleyaudubon.org>.

Connect With Us!

Email: pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com

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