



# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 22, No. 4. July/August 2000

## San Andres NWR

by Kevin Cobble,  
Refuge Manager

When people in the Las Cruces area think about a National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in New Mexico, Bosque del Apache NWR is usually what they think of. Many people are unaware that there is a large refuge (57,215 acres) within 30 miles of Las Cruces. The San Andres NWR is located in the southern portion of the San Andres mountains northeast of Las Cruces. The refuge was established in 1941 by Executive Order 8646 for "...the conservation and development of natural wildlife resources."

Many of the management activities on the Refuge have concentrated on the population of desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis mexicana*) that occur there. This is the last indigenous herd of desert bighorn in the Chihuahuan Desert. Primary emphasis since establishment has been the restoration and management of desert bighorn sheep, currently a state-listed endangered species in New Mexico. In 1941, the Refuge had a bighorn sheep population of approximately 30 animals which increased to 200 bighorn sheep by 1970. Because of a scabies mite epizootic in 1978, the population declined from 200 to 75 bighorn within a year. Between 1982 and 1994 the population ranged between 25 and 35 animals. Recent population counts indicated that the sheep population had been nearly decimated due to scabies, predation, drought, and poor reproduction.

In coordination with the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish (NMDGF) and White Sands Missile Range (WSMR), the Refuge transplanted six desert bighorn sheep rams into the San Andres Mountains from the NMDGF Red Rock captive breeding facility on 20 November 1999. This reintroduction is part of a Sentinel Ram study of the bighorn sheep on the Refuge. This study has two primary goals: 1) to determine whether extant desert bighorn sheep inhabit the San Andres Mountains; and 2) to determine whether the sentinel rams obtain scabies as they wander throughout the mountains.

The rams were fitted with radiocollars that have satellite capability. This has never been used on desert bighorn sheep and will enable refuge biologists to monitor the rams' movements much more quickly than with conventional radiocollars. By logging on to a satellite and obtaining the ram's location, animals can be pinpointed, which reduces the amount of time searching for the rams in the remote rugged terrain. Satellite locations are confirmed by visual observations of the rams.

All bighorn will be captured periodically to be tested for scabies. If the rams remain free of scabies for the duration of the two-year

(continued on page 2) See **San Andres**

## President's Message: We Need to Know

by Ed Mayfield, MVAS President

Our organization has grown over the past two years and now numbers over 350 members. It is growing every day and we need to know what to do to make the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society the best for you. We are going to canvas the membership by telephone to find out what you want the Officers and Board members to do with this expansion. We need to know your feelings, thoughts, and ideas to bring you an organization that will provide you with the programs and activities you want and need. In other words, what can we all do to make this the best organization possible for all members?

You are going to get a telephone call from one of the board members who will ask you a few questions so you can help us organize and initiate activities to make the MVAS an organization you will be proud to belong to. You will start getting telephone calls around the 17th of July. We will take a little bit of your time to get some basic information on how you feel about the organization and what we can do to make it the best for you.

You will be asked what you would like to see as a member: What can we do to be of service to you? What are the programs and activities in which you would like to participate? Please give this some thought and give us lots of new ideas to improve the MVAS.

## Welcome New Members

Richard Ross  
Charles Osgood  
Gene and Margaret Speer



by Jennifer Atchley

study, additional bighorns will be augmented into the San Andres mountains in order to restore the population.

In addition to the desert bighorn sheep, many other species are found on the refuge. Over 142 species of birds have been documented on the refuge. Thirty-eight species of mammals and 45 species of reptiles have been identified on the refuge. Additional species are being catalogued each year. Unique species such as the gray vireo and varied bunting have been seen on the refuge as well as a large population of golden eagles.

The refuge staff consists of a refuge manager, a wildlife biologist and an office assistant. Refuge projects include the Sentinel ram project, a prescribed fire program to improve wildlife habitat, bird inventory and monitoring work using banding and transects, reptile and amphibian inventories, plant monitoring in association with the prescribed burn program, invasive plant removal and numerous other projects.

*Note: To learn more about the San Andres Refuge, plan on attending our September program; Kevin will share a video with us and speak about refuge programs and ways in which we can become involved in refuge activities.*

The conservation committee of the Board is looking for volunteers to move the MVAS agenda forward and get results. If you've been looking for a way to get more involved with local conservation issues, here are several opportunities.

**Good Talkers:** One or two people are needed to start lobbying the candidates for the New Mexico House and Senate. We have a priority bill we want to submit this year for the protection of reptiles and amphibians. We need someone to speak with the candidates and let them know that if they want our votes, they should support this important legislation. Familiarity with animals not necessary, just a knack for getting people to see things your way.

**One Patient Hero:** Increasing the size of the livestock grazing enclosure at Palomas Marsh is a chapter priority for the year. The successful candidate will meet with BLM range management specialists and biologists to discuss the various options for enclosure size and shape, as well as funding sources for materials and labor. Knowledge of Palomas Marsh helpful, sense of humor a must.

**Arm Twister:** The New Mexico Important Bird Area project has not received a single submission from the southern part of the state! One person is needed to phone trip leaders and local experts to gently persuade them to fill out the forms. Experience with bodybuilding not necessary but helpful.

**Minnow Minder:** The fate of the endangered Silvery Minnow seems to change every day, especially during irrigation season. The Minnow Minder will help the chapter understand the population ups and downs by tracking minnow releases, kills, and productivity through October. Internet access essential for this one, as well as phone calls to Albuquerque.

**Dreamers:** One or two people are needed to sit on an ad-hoc task force dedicated to protecting open space and agricultural lands in the Mesilla Valley. The task force meets once a month, and they have requested a representative from Audubon. If you can share Audubon's vision of conserving and restoring natural ecosystems in our own back yard, and are concerned by increased urbanization, then please consider sitting on this task force. If we have two representatives than the duties can be shared!

If you would like to volunteer please phone Jennifer Atchley in the evenings at 526-1320 for more information on any of these projects. If you have been thinking about giving time to conservation, consider that right now we have the opportunity to build a team of advocates for creatures that can not speak for themselves, and demonstrate to all of New Mexico that healthy ecosystems are essential for the quality of life we desire.

**JOIN NOW!**

I would like to join the National Audubon Society and Mesilla Valley Audubon Society for the introductory rate of \$20.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Q54  
7XCH

Membership includes the publications *Audubon* and *Roadrunner Ramblings*.

Send this application and your check (made payable to National Audubon Society) to:

Membership, MVAS  
P.O. Box 1645  
Las Cruces, NM 88004



**MVAS Receives a Gift**

Things happen from time to time that make the world seem like it is covered with delicious chocolate. Recently MVAS received a gift of \$1000.00 from Mr. & Mrs. Charles Osgood, who happen to live in Intervale, New Hampshire. MVAS first met Charles when he participated in our field trip at Grayfeathers Lodge; since then, he joined us on our trip to the Chiricahuas, he has become a member of

MVAS, and he and his wife made their generous donation to our organization. I'm sure that you all want to join me in giving Mr. & Mrs. Osgood a very warm and heartfelt thanks. We are looking forward to seeing Charles again on October 14, when we will have another field trip to the Chiricahuas. Thanks, Charles, from all of us in New Mexico.

*Ed Mayfield*

## Birding Hot Spot: Holloman Lake

by Gording Ewing

Holloman Lake and the adjoining wetlands are located at the southwestern corner of Holloman Air Force Base in Otero County. The water for this system is mainly waste water from the airbase with sporadic contributions from rain. For many years the airbase used a lagoon system to partially treat its waste water. Raw sewage flowed successively through a series of seven ponds where biological activity partially decomposed the organic matter. The first 6 small ponds were filled in when the air force put in a modern waste water treatment plant a few years ago. The water in the seventh, Lagoon G, was (and is)

retained by a constructed dike. Outflow from Lagoon G went into an open ditch which drained over a mile in a westerly direction into Holloman Lake which is also retained by an earth and rubble dike. In wet years water from Holloman Lake seeps through this dike into a playa that is crossed by HW 70. This playa is affectionately known as Lake Stinky. During the wet years in the 1980s, Lake Stinky had water an inch or two deep over much of its area but lately the water is mostly limited to a small amount at the base of the Holloman Lake dike.

The outlet of the new waste water treatment plant is too far west and too low for the water to drain into Lagoon G. Instead it drains directly into the north end of Lake Holloman. Much to the delight of

MVAS and other wildlife conservation groups, Holloman AFB decided to preserve Lagoon G and to put in 3 or 4 dikes between Lagoon G and Lake Holloman for a constructed wetland. To do this, part of the effluent from the WWTP is pumped back up into Lagoon G. The treated waste water flows from Lagoon G to Holloman Lake through the constructed wetlands. These wetlands have not been as large as expected because of a prolonged dry spell. The wetlands are, however, an impressive addition to the wildlife habitat.

**Directions.** Holloman Lake is about 55 miles Northeast of Las Cruces on Highway 70. To get there, turn left from HWY 70 3.8 miles NE of the White Sands National Monument Headquarters on a dirt road that goes north on the east edge of the Stinky Playa. Driving 0.2 mile brings you to the dike at the lower end of Lake Holloman. Stop here and scan the lake and Stinky Playa for birds. The playa is usually the best place in the area to see Snowy Plovers. Killdeer, Northern Shovelers and Eared Grebes are almost always in this area. I once saw 67 Marbled Godwits on the playa and another time a Peregrine Falcon hit a Least Sandpiper flying a few feet over the playa.

Next drive north 0.4 mile and walk westward on the road (now closed to cars) to the place where the ditch from Lagoon G drains into Holloman Lake. Scan this area for waterfowl and shorebirds. Now drive east along the drainage ditch. Within 50 yds is a gated road that follows the east shore of Lake Holloman. While motorized traffic is prohibited, it is possible to walk all the way around Lake Holloman on this road. The distance is probably 3 to 4 miles. A shorter walk is to just go to the north end of the lake where most of the treated waste water now enters the lake and then return to your car. The round-trip is about 2 miles.

Back on the road along the drain, drive generally eastward (watch for sparrows, warblers, flycatchers, ducks, coots, herons and hawks as you drive) after 0.6 miles is another gated road to the left. You can walk out on a low dike and see the birds in the constructed wetlands. After another 0.3 of a mile on the drain road you reach the east gate. Park here and walk about a quarter of a mile east to Lagoon G. Along the drain one usually seen Green Herons and maybe a Sora.

(continued on page 4) See *Hot Spot*

### Bird Notes

| Species                   | Date   | Location         | Observer   |
|---------------------------|--------|------------------|------------|
| Summer Tanager            | Apr 26 | Las Cruces       | PH         |
| Lark Bunting              | Apr 27 | Las Cruces       | JMc, EMc   |
| Phainopepla               | May 1  | Las Cruces       | JJ         |
| Cave Swallow              | May 1  | Lower Valley     | MS, JZ     |
| Indigo Bunting            | May 1  | Anthony          | MS, JZ     |
| Willet                    | May 1  | Anthony          | MS, JZ     |
| American Redstart         | May 1  | Dripping Springs | JH, SH     |
| Townsend's Warbler        | May 1  | Dripping Springs | JH, SH     |
| Brown Thrasher            | May 2  | Old Refuge       | WS         |
| Scrub Jay                 | May 4  | Las Cruces       | SH, WH     |
| Swainson's Thrush         | May 8  | Deming           | WS, KS     |
| Acorn Woodpecker          | May 8  | Columbus         | WS, KS     |
| Eastern Phoebe            | May 8  | Columbus         | WS, KS     |
| Red-eyed Vireo            | May 8  | Columbus         | WS, KS     |
| Buff-breasted Flycatcher  | May 8  | Clanton Canyon   | CBI        |
| Northern Parula           | May 9  | Clanton Canyon   | WS, KS     |
| Bendire's Thrasher        | May 9  | Clanton Canyon   | WS, KS     |
| Common Nighthawk          | May 19 | Las Cruces       | SH, WH     |
| Lesser Nighthawk          | May 21 | Las Cruces       | TL         |
| Northern Parula           | May 22 | Pine Tree Trail  | CBe        |
| Olive-sided Flycatcher    | May 22 | Pine Tree Trail  | CBe        |
| Orchard Oriole            | May 28 | Las Cruces       | JM         |
| Eastern Phoebe            | Jun 2  | Percha SP        | GE         |
| Yellow-billed Cuckoo      | Jun 2  | Percha SP        | GE         |
| Calliope Hummingbird      | Jun 5  | Las Cruces       | TL         |
| Scissor-tailed Flycatcher | Jun 12 | Ladder Ranch     | SD         |
| Painted Bunting           | Jun 21 | La Mesa          | SH, WH, TL |

Observers: Craig Benkman, Chris Black, Steve Dobrott, Gordon Ewing, Jerry Hammon, Shary Hammon, Sue Hill, Wally Hill, Patrick Holian, Joni Johnson, Tim Lawton, Jim Mulhauser, Joy McFarland, Earl McFarland, Marcy Scott, William Seager, Keith Seager, Jimmy Zabriskie

Please report early, late, or unusual sightings to Tim Lawton  
505-522-2056 or tlawton@nmsu.edu

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323



## Field Trips

*New Mexico's summer weather is variable. Please be prepared with layered clothing, sunscreen, and plenty of water.*

**South Valley, July 15.** Ed Mayfield will be leading this outing to the A&G Sod Farms, where many birds flock to the green circles in the desert on the mesa above Santa Teresa, and to other areas in the south valley where we will find birds. Several sparrow species will be found along with Horned Lark, Meadowlark, Killdeer, Long-billed Curlew and several other species. Bring water and your mid-morning snacks. We will be finished by noon and you can pick up a neat lunch in one of the many restaurants in the valley. Bring along your sunscreen with a cap or hat. Meet at the Pan Am center at 6:30 AM. Contact Ed (call 382-0715 or email [emayfield@mvpisp.com](mailto:emayfield@mvpisp.com)) for further information.

**Dripping Springs and La Cueva, August 19.** In addition to gorgeous scenery, this BLM-managed Natural Area at the base of the Organ Mountains is host to many desert foothills specialties including Black-chinned Sparrows, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Canyon Towhees, Canyon Wrens, Golden Eagles, Scrub Jays, and many other species. Meet at the Visitor's Center when the park opens at 8 AM. Plan on spending about 4 hours on this trip; contact Carole Shirreffs (521-0079 or [its\\_herself@yahoo.com](mailto:its_herself@yahoo.com)) for more details.

**Chiricahua Mountains and vicinity, August 25-27.** This field trip to south-eastern Arizona will take advantage of the post-breeding dispersal during the

monsoon. The TENTATIVE itinerary will be as follows. *Friday, August 25:* Depart Las Cruces mid-afternoon and check San Simon Cienega and San Simon Valley for sparrows. Trip leader (Tim Lawton) will camp out, but accommodations are available in Lordsburg, 45 minutes away, and in Portal. *Saturday, August 26:* Meet in Portal at 7 AM (6 AM Arizona time) and bird South Fork for trogon, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Cordilleran Flycatcher; then Onion Saddle road for Montezuma Quail, Strickland's Woodpecker; then high mountains for Pygmy Nuthatch, Olive Warbler, Grace's Warbler. *Sunday, August 27:* meet at Rustler Park at 8 AM for walk to Barfoot Lookout to see any high elevation birds we missed on Saturday. Return via Paradise, an old mining camp, to look for Juniper Titmouse. This time of year almost guarantees afternoon showers, which can be cool and drenching. All roads (if dry) navigable by standard sedan, with easy to moderate walks optional. Itinerary subject to change if oddities are reported in the vicinity. For info, contact Tim Lawton (522-2056).

*Note: If you can't make the August trip, don't despair, we will be having another trip to the Chiricahuas on October 14.*



## Programs

*Programs and meetings are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month, September - April.*

**See you in September**

*(continued from page 3) Hot Spot*

Many ducks, gulls and shorebirds are found on Lagoon G. Twice I have seen Fulvous Whistling Ducks here. Also in the spring and fall several hundred Wilson's Phalaropes may be feeding here. Marsh Wrens and various blackbirds can be seen below the dam that retains Lagoon G.

A Checklist of Birds is usually available at the Holloman Lake dike. It lists 228 birds. I have seen at least 182 bird species in this area.

## Field Trip Reports

**Holloman Lake, 18 May.** We had a pretty good trip, starting late, about 9 AM, and birding until about 1 PM. Three of us were there: Gordon Ewing, Ed Mayfield and Lucia Wilcox. We saw 43 species by my count. Nothing really rare was seen, but I did see 3 new birds for this year: Green Heron, a pair, probably nesting; Olive-sided Flycatcher, 2; and Bank Swallow, 1 (there were probably more, but only one flew over so I could see his breast band).

*Gordon Ewing*

**Chiricahua Mountains, 29 May.** The trip to the Chiricahuas was, once again, a very rewarding experience. Twenty people went and several were beginning birders. The Chiricahuas is a very good place for beginning birders because there are so many different birds there. We saw 54 varieties including the Elegant Trogon and (not fully confirmed) the Flame-colored Tanager, along with Lazuli Buntings, Painted Redstart, Indigo Buntings, Black-headed and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, plus several others. We had two visitors on the trip with us, Charles Osgood from New Hampshire and Mike Atkinson, from Germany, both excellent birders.

*Ed Mayfield*

**NMSU Vertebrate Museum, 10 June.**

The visit to the vertebrate museum in the Biology Department was grand. Jeff Brown provided us with more birds than I could have imagined. Jeff concentrated on raptors but opened many cabinets and drawers for us to see the whole collection. It was well worth the time. Several of us stayed "after school" to watch Jeff skin a Cooper's Hawk. The man is an artist. I will look forward to going again in the fall.

*Carole Shirreffs*

## Instructors Wanted

Would you like to help kids learn more about the environment? Thanks to a grant from EPA, and with much assistance from Project Del Rio, Southwest Environmental Center is offering three Saturday training sessions in August/September that will provide you with everything you need to teach an after-school K-6 enrichment program. Possible topics include desert life, recycling, bugs, etc. The course is free to all who sign up to be instructors in one of the after-school enrichment programs currently offered at various Las Cruces elementary schools. You don't have to be a teacher. You'll earn \$8-10/hour as an instructor. Call Lisa LaRocque at 522-7511 or Wendy Davis (MVAS Education Chair) at 527-4551 for more information.

## What is Audubon Adventures? An On-going Success Story

by Lorraine Schulte, Committee Chair

Audubon Adventures is the most popular National Audubon Society education program for children in grades 4-6. The program is used by classroom teachers, after-school program coordinators, special education instructors, language arts teachers and home-schoolers. Developed by professional environmental educators, Audubon Adventures presents basic, scientifically accurate facts about birds, wildlife, their habitats and needs.

Audubon Society chapters sponsor 90% of the Audubon Adventures classroom programs across the United States. Since its inception in 1984, over 7 million youngsters have participated in the program. Mesilla Valley Audubon Society is one of the participating chapters. This past school year 81 classrooms in our area (Las Cruces, Truth or Consequences, and Alamogordo) were enrolled in this excellent nature study program. Next year 83 classrooms will participate.

Each kit contains a Classroom Resource Manual for the teacher's use which includes a long list of books, CD-ROM, Videos and web sites. A video on one of the subjects and a poster are also included along with newspapers on each subject for the students. The study material is updated every year by a team of professional education writers, Audubon scientists, and environmental educators. Subjects covered in 1999-2000 were Sharing the Earth, The Mighty Forest, Eagle Adventures, Wild Alaska, Our One and Only Everglades. New subjects now ready for students to study in 2000-2001 include The Living Ocean, Endangered Species, Owls, Nature's Banquet (plants, seeds, fruit, flowers), and Dolphin

Adventures. Audubon Adventures Online is set to launch in June 2000 and will be updated with new stories, puzzles and games monthly.

Sponsors of Audubon Adventures connect youth to nature in the community, bringing environmental education to our school children. The following is a list of contributors for the year 2000-2001: Thomas and Jane Teague, Shirley J. Minge, William and Donna Jacobson, Lorraine and John Schulte, Thelma Gariano, Robert (Tito) Meyer, R. E. Mayfield, Katie McLane, John and MaryLou Wallace, Connie Lyons and Bill Pannell, Ann Heying, Donna Wood, Ann Goode, Bob Tafanelli, Shirley Whalen, H.A. Manning-Citizen's Bank, Mary R. Williams, Tim and Diana Lawton, Madeline Schroeder, Carole Shireffs, Nigel Fitch, H.A. Mendoza, John and Janice Ludtka, M/M David Newman, Edward and Rebecca McNair, M/M Edwin Benjamin, Dr. and Mrs. William Klein, Kenneth and Neoma Smith, Barbara Myers, Nancy Stotz, Robert and Wendy Davis, John and Leslye Ramirez, Jerry Knudson, Helen M. Barber, Darrell Mott, Desert Daubers Garden Club, M/M R. K. Blackman, John Mangameli, Maryann Thibodeau, Las Cruces Area Catholic Schools-2campuses, Highland Elementary PTO, and Jornada Elementary PTO.

Committee members include Joy McFarland (Teacher Contact), Bill Jacobson, Lorraine Schulte (chairman). Donna Woods and Wendy Davis assisted with calling PTO groups and visiting schools.



### House Finches and Sparrows in Focus: Sex in the City

by Nancy Stotz

If you're like me, you probably scorn them as "junk birds" or worse—those hordes of House Sparrows and House Finches that can clean out a feeder in a matter of moments. However, research described in a recent issue of *The Condor* has given me a new appreciation for, and curiosity about, these prolific inhabitants of my neighborhood.

Both species have sexually dimorphic plumage, with males being more showy and colorful than females. And in both species, females do the choosing, taking a close look at males before deciding upon a mate. In House Sparrows, females tend to prefer males with a larger "badge" (the black bib on the throat), and in House Finches, females opt for the brightest, reddest males. The choices females make aren't merely a reflection of avian aesthetics, as the chosen males generally confer direct benefits to the females and their offspring. Male House Sparrows with large badges tend to have access to better nesting sites and they spend more time helping to feed nestling than small-badged males. Male House Finches with brighter plumage are more attentive to nesting females, providing them with more food than dull males, and they also have fewer parasites and higher survival rates.

Though it might seem that the showy males of both species have it made, their situations are not necessarily ideal. For House Sparrows, a big badge is no guarantee of mate fidelity. Although considered monogamous, House Sparrows, like many other songbirds, often engage in extra-pair copulations, when a



(continued on page 6) See *In Focus*

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is a conservation and natural history organization in southern New Mexico that promotes appreciation and conservation of birds, other wildlife, and habitat, through environmental education, issue advocacy, and natural history experiences.

OFFICERS AND BOARD

|                |                  |          |
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Board meetings are held, September through May, on the Thursday before the 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 PM at the Southwest Environmental Center, 1491A S. Solano Dr., Las Cruces, NM 88011. All Audubon members are welcome.

Visit our website at [www.cybermesa.com/~mvas/](http://www.cybermesa.com/~mvas/).

(continued from page 5) *In Focus*

female mates with a male (or males) other than the one she has chosen to help her build a nest and care for young. And females that pair up with the preferred, big-badged males are just as likely to fool around as are females paired with smaller-badged males. Since about a third of all nests contain offspring of multiple males, there's a good chance that a big-badged male, who has a prime nest site and delivers plenty of food to nestlings, is raising some other male's offspring.

Bright male House Finches endure a different sort of problem: they're on the bottom of the totem pole. In their interactions with other males, during both the breeding and non-breeding season, bright males are subordinate to dull males, meaning that drab individuals can supplant bright males when competing directly for access to food and other resources. Since bright males are already preferred by females, dull males appear to have adopted a different strategy to acquire resources and attract females' attention; they are more aggressive in encounters with other finches and they engage in more singing than bright males.

There's a House Finch singing outside my window right now. How bright is his plumage? There are fledgling House Sparrows begging from adults in the side yard. Whose offspring are they? You can be sure I'll be keeping a much closer eye on my neighbors in the future.

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Whitekiller, R.R., D.F. Westneat, P.L. Schwagmeyer, and D.W. Mock. 2000. Badge size and extra-pair fertilizations in the House Sparrow. *The Condor*, Vol. 102, no. 2, pp. 342-348.

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