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CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

BULLETIN

# Bad Day at Blackrock:

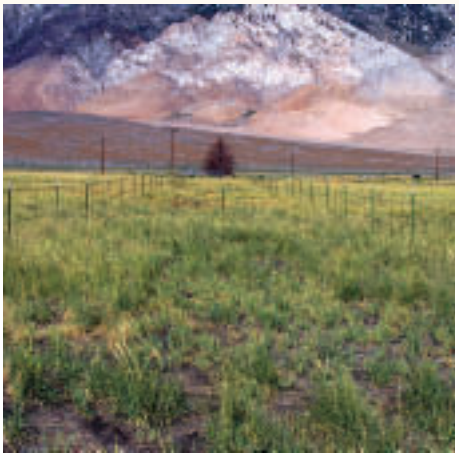
## Excessive pumping affects rare habitat and plants in Owens Valley

BY DANIEL PRITCHETT

The Bristlecone Chapter of CNPS was founded in 1984, in part to advocate for protection of Owens Valley resources from excessive groundwater pumping by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP). In 1991 Inyo County and Los Angeles settled 19 years of litigation over groundwater management by signing the historic Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement (LTWA). The LTWA was controversial, but Bristlecone Chapter founder (and CNPS Fellow) Mary DeDecker supported the final version.

Seventeen years later, there are many problems with LTWA groundwater management. One of the most serious is its politicization. Mountains of monitoring data are gathered, but they're trumped by political considerations. Examples of the consequences of politics-based management occur throughout Owens Valley, but a particularly egregious one is found around Blackrock Spring, near Independence.

The story began in 1941, when the California Department of Fish and Game established a fish hatchery at Blackrock Spring. For years, about 8,000 acre feet per year (af/yr) of spring water flowed through the hatchery and straight to the nearby LA Aqueduct. When DWP enlarged its aqueduct in 1970 and began massive groundwater pumping to fill the enlarged capacity, Blackrock Spring stopped flowing. Two DWP wells at the hatchery were then pumped to replace the spring flow.





Monitoring photos by Daniel Pritchett; inset photo by Larry Blakely.

**What happens when groundwater-dependent meadows are denied access to groundwater? The photos above show two monitoring sites near Blackrock Spring. Both had similar grass cover (about 29%) in 1988 and both sites burned in a July 2007 wildfire. Groundwater pumping has drawn down the water table under the site on the right continuously since at least 1987. The water table under the site on the left recovered to the bottom of the grass rooting zone in 1998. Inset photo: CNPS-listed Inyo County star-tulip *(Calochortus excavatus).***

Unfortunately, the loss of the spring flow—8,000 af/yr—was mitigated by pumping about 12,500 af/yr through the hatchery into the LA Aqueduct. By

*(continued on page 6)*

# Restoring Plants Used by California Indians

## Historians and archaeologists are helping CNPS and its partners reconstruct native habitat in San Diego's Old Town

BY PETER ST. CLAIR

An exciting and historically significant native plant project is underway at Old Town San Diego State Historic Park. The project aims to transform a number of landscaped areas in the park with plants that were used by the Kumeyaay, California Indians who lived in the area for several thousand years.

The San Diego chapter of CNPS and its partners, San Diego River Park Foundation, California State Parks (CSP), and the state-chartered San Diego River Conservancy, all took part in an ambitious first planting earlier in 2008. They installed annuals, perennials, shrubs, and trees representative of the most important riparian and riverbank species used historically and contemporaneously by the Kumeyaay, whose village of Koss'ai (Cosoy) was founded long before Spanish, Mexican, and American settlers arrived in what is now called Old Town.

*(continued on page 6)*



# From the Executive Director:

## Farewell and Looking Ahead

Sadly enough, the time for me to say farewell has come. I feel so honored to have had the opportunity of working with CNPS. I have thoroughly enjoyed coming to work every day, for which I will always be grateful. I leave CNPS feeling proud of what we have accomplished together.

In the past three years, CNPS has grown and flourished. CNPS is the finest plant conservation organization in California, with more than 9,000 members working to increase understanding of California's native plant diversity and to do whatever they can to conserve it.

The CNPS 2009 Conservation Conference: Strategies and Solutions, which we initiated and largely organized, will increase public awareness of the need to use plant science in conserving California's natural habitats and key ecosystems. The second edition of the *Manual of California Vegetation*, a major undertaking which has been accomplished thanks to the work of CNPS Vegetation Program staff in collaboration with other experts, is the result of 15 years of vegetation research and will assist greatly in future conservation planning.

The CNPS Education Program has been helping hundreds of environmental professionals to hone their botanical skills so they will be more effective in promoting plant conservation. At the same time, hundreds of dedicated CNPS volunteers are working to increase the impact our 33 chapters have on conservation throughout the state. Our small but very dedicated and capable group of staff effectively run our five programs and executive office, and produce our state publications.

In light of these and other important accomplishments, CNPS is in a favorable position to continue to expand the scope of its programmatic work, as well as to develop its institutional capacity to support future growth in membership and programs. CNPS's strategic vision, mission, and programmatic goals also provide an excellent framework for the Society's future work.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for the trust you have placed in me. I am also deeply grateful for the support you have provided me during these extraordinary and special years of my professional career.

**Amanda Jorgenson**
Executive Director

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## New Staff

Please welcome our new staff: Anna Ostrowercha, administrative assistant, and Jack Tracey, development director.

Anna will help us maintain our membership database and offices files, as well as provide much needed administrative support to CNPS office staff. Previously she worked as a clerk at the Superior Court of California in Lake County. Anna is a genealogy enthusiast, and in her spare time enjoys researching her ancestry.

Jack has extensive experience in fund development and management of nonprofit organizations. As program developer for the Sacramento-based agency, Strategies for Change, he was responsible for all phases of development and fundraising. Jack is a board member of the California Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, and a member of the Planned Giving Forum of Sacramento. He has a B.A. in legal education and services from the University of Massachusetts, and a M.S. in applied management from Lesley University.

**Amanda Jorgenson**
Executive Director



Amanda Jorgenson

**Anna Ostrowercha**



Amanda Jorgenson

**Jack Tracey**

# Guest Editorial:

## Solar Energy Projects Must Be Modified to Avoid Extensive Harm to Native Habitat and Wildlife

By Nick Jensen

In the 2008 elections, political candidates made America's energy independence a central point of their campaigns. Nearly all of us can agree that the implementation of renewable energy development—including solar, wind, and geothermal energy—is a vital step toward increasing our energy independence, combating global warming, and ensuring our national security. Unfortunately, as the details of proposed solar energy projects in the western U.S. are unveiled, it is evident that many of these projects are far from green.

To date, in California's deserts alone, more than 80 solar energy projects have been proposed covering an extraordinary 700,000 acres (over 1,000 square miles). Most of these projects are located on pristine publicly-owned lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial counties. All of these projects have received BLM right-of-way grants and are at varying stages in the permitting process.

The potential impact of these projects to rare plants, vegetation, animals, and intact, majestic desert landscapes is unfathomable. In the construction process, solar energy developments effectively denude the landscape and leave little intact habitat in their path. CNPS expects that, if implemented, these projects would significantly impact dozens of rare plant species and thousands of acres of pristine vegetation. Indirect impacts such as access roads, the release and spread of invasive plants, power lines, and resulting habitat fragmentation, will combine to expand the footprint of proposed projects well beyond their stated acreage.

The nearly 10,000-acre Ivanpah Project, located in San Bernardino County near the California-Nevada border, is one project that is close to approval and implementation (a draft NEPA/CEQA document is expected early in 2009). Preliminary analysis of the project indicates that it will significantly impact 13 CNPS-listed rare plants, including 80% of the known California occurrences of Mohave milkweed (*Asclepias nyctaginifolia*), a CNPS List 2 species. While the botanical resources at the Ivanpah Project site are significant, when compared to other proposed solar energy development sites, it is not considered to be exceptional or unique. Imagine the cumulative impact of dozens of projects that could cover more than 70 times the acreage of the Ivanpah Project.

CNPS strongly recommends that lawmakers, government agencies, and solar energy developers immediately begin discussions to evaluate alternatives to the proposed solar projects in California's deserts. Future policies should focus first on energy conservation as a means of reducing overall energy demand. In the shift toward renewable energy sources, we must demand that projects are conducted in an environmentally sensitive manner. Priority should be given to locating solar energy development in underutilized urban areas, such as on rooftops, highway medians, parking lots, or other degraded lands including the abundant agricultural land that is no longer productive.



**Aerial photo of a solar development site in San Bernardino County. This site covers approximately 1,000 acres or 1.5 square miles. Proposed developments could cover an area over 700 times this size. Photo courtesy of USDA-FSA Aerial Photography Field Office, NAIP 2005 Imagery for California.**



Jim Andre

**An overview of the proposed Ivanpah Project site, 2008. Inset: Mohave milkweed *(Asclepias nyctaginifolia).***

At a minimum, we must demand that project impacts are appropriately mitigated. Additionally, before projects are approved, regulators should fully evaluate their impact on ecosystem function, native vegetation, wildlife, and rare species.

Over the next several months, CNPS will be working to influence agencies and lawmakers to take a greener path to green energy. We will also be launching a campaign to educate our members and the public about the impacts of proposed solar energy projects in California's deserts.

To learn more about desert solar energy development, please visit *http://www.cnps.org/energy*, and for information on how you can get involved, contact Nick Jensen *(njensen@cnps.org)*.

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**Nick Jensen** is currently CNPS Rare Plant Botanist. He has worked for CNPS since 2006 in both the CNPS Vegetation and Rare Plant Programs, and before that for the U.S Forest Service. Nick holds a B.S. in environmental horticulture and urban forestry, with an emphasis in plant biodiversity and restoration ecology.

# CHAPTER NEWS

## MILO BAKER CHAPTER:
## Strategies to Recruit Younger Members

As in most volunteer organizations, CNPS chapters face a number of common challenges, including how to bring in new members, and how to transfer expertise from older members to younger ones.

Over the past several years, the Milo Baker Chapter has made a conscious effort to attract younger members to our chapter, particularly those of college age through their early thirties. One of our successful strategies has been through outreach to two area colleges. We created two chapter board positions for a student representative from each school, and recruited interested students through our personal relationships with college faculty. At least three students have stayed on the board after their term expired to take on other positions in the past four years.

Through these student reps, we award two $500 scholarships per year for students studying Sonoma County flora issues or general botany as an undergraduate or graduate student. We require our award recipients to attend a board meeting and present their research, which is rewarding for the board members and encourages the students to become more involved.



Gary Hundt

**Sarah Gordon (center, without hat) checks out a flower with Milo Baker Chapter members on a rare plant field trip to Annadel State Park. Sarah joined the chapter board as a graduate student at Sonoma State University and now serves as Vine Hill Preserve Steward, in addition to participating in vegetation and rare plant surveys.**

Our general meetings on scientific topics are often attended by local college students who receive extra course credit for attending. Often they are interested in the specimens at Plant ID hour (which precedes each monthly chapter program), and after talking to chapter members there, they end up joining CNPS. Advertising our hikes and meetings to the public has also attracted many staff from local agencies and consulting firms who are in their thirties, and collaborative projects have encouraged them to join CNPS.

**Lynn Houser,** President
Milo Baker Chapter

## RIVERSIDE-SAN BERNARDINO CHAPTER:
## Reinvigorating a Chapter Through Effective Outreach

The CNPS Riverside-San Bernardino Chapter is in one of the fastest developing areas of North America, with members spread out from downtown San Bernardino and Riverside to the desert areas near Palm Springs. Like many chapters, we struggle with the challenge of involving our current members and recruiting new members to support the important work of CNPS.



Arlee Montalvo

**RSB Chapter members led native plant walks this spring at Diamond Valley Reservoir near Hemet, in a native habitat area that opens to the public seasonally for spring wildflower viewing.**

Recently we have experienced success using some old fashioned methods. We have redoubled our efforts to get the word out about our meetings, and focused our programs on topics with a horticultural angle. We post meeting information on newspaper and local media websites, send out emails with a program flyer to everyone we can think of, and mail a postcard to members that arrives a few days before each meeting as a last minute reminder.

We are excited to report that these strategies have worked! Meeting attendance has swelled from a dozen or less to 30–50 people. These outreach efforts recently also yielded a group of UC Riverside graduate students who volunteered at our annual plant sale in November.

Another great outreach opportunity has come from participating in community programs promoting water efficient landscaping and sustainability. We participated in a desert garden community day in October, and are looking forward to a Riverside County workshop to promote water efficient landscaping and native plants in spring 2009.

**Katie Barrows,** President
Riverside-San Bernardino Chapter

CENTER FOR INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT

Connecting Science, Management, and Policy

## New E-Newsletter on Invasive Plants

The Center for Invasive Plant Management (CIPM) now offers a free bimonthly electronic newsletter, which covers a variety of topics related to invasive plant science, management, education, and policy. For instance, the most recent issue features a number of articles on early detection and rapid response methodology, a report on the use of "tiered" lists in model weed laws, research findings on cheatgrass, and information about an online learning website on managing invasive plants.

To view the latest issue, or to subscribe and receive the newsletter in your email, go to: *http://www.weedcenter.org/*.

## Automatic Membership Renewal

Have you ever found, like me, that your CNPS membership had lapsed because you put the reminder aside and it then got buried under a pile of junk mail? If so, now you can set up an automatic membership renewal on the CNPS website *(www.cnps.org)*.

Just click on the purple iris button to join, renew, or set up a recurring membership for yourself or someone else. Then follow the instructions for a one-time payment or to renew automatically on your expiration date.

You also have the option of creating a gift or memorial membership, and then the individual (or next of kin) will be notified. Once you click the "Continue" button you will receive a password that allows you to change your membership preferences at any time.

**Alison Shilling**
CNPS State Board of Directors




## In Appreciation: June Bilisoly

### Protector of Rare Serpentine Endemics

June Bilisoly, long-term supporter of CNPS, passed away in November 2007 at the age of 77. Active in the Santa Clara Valley Chapter, June promoted local conservation and education activities. She helped to prepare the manuscript of Helen Sharsmith's *Flora of the Mount Hamilton Range of California*, published by CNPS. June was also an enthusiastic participant in chapter field trips, including backpacking to Snow Mountain in Mendocino County.

Recognizing the threat of development on rare serpentine endemics—such as the 280 freeway—she and others helped start the Serpentine Protection League, dedicated to saving rare endemics on the San Francisco peninsula. This group first focused its efforts on preserving fritillaria that lay in the path of the freeway. Soon afterward, it targeted the threat posed to rare plants by the proposed golf course at Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve. This effort became the spark that led to the successful movement to preserve Edgewood.



An undaunted June Bilisoly in 1953, after driving her car off a muddy road in British Columbia.

June's generosity and long-term commitment to plant conservation was also expressed in her will. She left a quarter of her estate to CNPS, or a total of $800,000. She believed that "plants cannot save themselves from human destruction; only people who care can."

**Don Mayall,** Santa Clara Valley Chapter
**Amanda Jorgenson,** Executive Director

## Blackrock

*(from page 1)*

pumping far more water than ever flowed from the spring, the water table has been lowered under rare alkali meadow habitat extending several hundred acres to the south and west. The affected area is also home to at least one population of the beautiful CNPS-listed Inyo County star-tulip (*Calochortus excavatus*).

Monitoring data show that the meadow habitat is undergoing desertification. Cover of native grasses is declining relative to that of invasive shrubs, and LTWA baseline conditions are not being maintained. This is exactly what biologists predict will occur when groundwater-dependent ecosystems, such as alkali meadow, are denied access to groundwater. There is a simple solution: reduce pumping to a volume matching the former spring flow. This will provide as much water to the hatchery as it was built to use. According to Inyo-DWP hydrologic models, it will also lead to several feet of water table recovery within a few years. This would be a win-win solution for plants and fish.

The Bristlecone Chapter has complained about this problem for years, to no avail. In July 2007, we sent a formal, written request to Inyo and DWP that management be modified. As of November 2008, our request still hasn't been addressed. This isn't surprising. By ignoring our request, DWP doesn't have to reduce its pumping, and Inyo doesn't risk offending DWP. Meanwhile, Los Angeles Mayor Villaraigosa has proclaimed his "absolute commitment" to honor LA's obligation to protect the Owens Valley environment, while DWP's General Manager, David Nahai, refuses to make any commitment to water table recovery.

As in most cases of environmental mismanagement, there are two approaches to forcing a resolution: political pressure and litigation. To generate the former we need assistance. Please visit www.ovcweb.org/Issues/Blackrock.html to find the latest information about this issue and suggestions for action.

**Daniel Pritchett** is Conservation Chair of the CNPS Bristlecone Chapter. He has been researching and writing about DWP's excessive Owens Valley groundwater pumping and its effects on native ecosystems since 1997.

## Restoring Plants

*(from page 1)*

The approximately two-acre planting site was designed by CNPS member and landscape architect, Kay Stewart, working together with State Parks landscape architect Robert Patterson and maintenance supervisor Guy Raffetto. Back in March 2007, CNPS San Diego sent a letter to the Superintendent of the Coastal Division of CSP, Ronie Clark, requesting permission to restore the area. Ronie, who was once an officer of the San Diego Chapter and good friends with Kay, approved the project virtually the day she received the letter. In addition to Bob Patterson, her staff historians and archaeologists worked closely with Kay and CNPS to realize this first phase of the project.

Members of the Kumeyaay also offered technical assistance. Ethnobotanist Richard Bugbee, working with Kumeyaay elder Jane Dumas and a number of tribal healers in California and northern Baja, provided information on California native plant species used for food, to construct shelter, and to make baskets, clothes, tools, and medicine. The Kumeyaay names and uses will ultimately be reflected in new interpretive signage at the garden and linked to other exhibits in Old Town.

In addition to donating plants for the project, CNPS San Diego paid for site work, an expanded irrigation system, and tons of mulch. The funds came from a bequest from Rita Delapa, a CNPS member and volunteer, whose interest was to showcase native plants in public places. CNPS graciously matched the bequest with chapter funds.

San Diego River Park Foundation provided advice on the selection, care, and maintenance of riparian species. It was also responsible for recruiting at least 100 of the volunteers who assisted with the restoration work using its extensive network and contacts among community-based organizations.

CNPS is now engaged in discussions with the San Diego River Conservancy to use state bond funds to pay for later phases of the native plant restoration in Old Town State Park, including more extensive interpretive programs, signs, and other information. Considering that the park has over seven million visitors a year, a lot of people get to see the CNPS-sponsored garden and learn more about the uses of native plants and the value of restoring native habitat.

**Peter St. Clair** is currently assisting CNPS with its federal, state, and local legislative priorities. He has been a member of the Society since 2000, and is affiliated with the San Diego Chapter.



Photo Credits: Michelle Cloud-Hughes (white sage); Gabi McLean

**Among the most important plants for the Kumeyaay people were white sage *(Salvia apiana),* left, and Mojave yucca *(Yucca schidigera),* right.**

# Gardening With Natives

## Do Your Neighboring Plants Play Well Together?

By Barbara Eisenstein

The pot label says "…grows to six feet tall and wide." In my horticulture talks, I always warn people to believe the label and be sure to leave ample room to allow their new plants to fill out. Many novice gardeners just cannot space native plants far enough apart for them to comfortably reach their mature girth. To these gardeners, a newly planted native garden, with proper spacing, can look alarmingly sparse.

New gardeners commonly place plants by "feel," resulting in an overcrowded garden that requires more pruning than one would prefer. Sometimes, though, overlapping or crowding some plants can lead to interesting, naturalistic combinations.

On the west side of a long fence in my yard I planted some *Salvia* 'Pozo Blue.' They grew nicely but were a bit leggy due to inadequate sun, and not enough tipping back and pruning during their early years. (Just as the cobbler has no shoes, the horticulturist's garden is often neglected.) Near it I placed a large California fuchsia (*Epilobium* 'Route 66'). If both of these plants had grown fully they would have been bumping into each other in no time, but because of the limited sunlight, they were leggy.

One autumn afternoon I looked over at the sages and noticed bright red tubular flowers. My first thought was: What is that plant? Then I remembered the Route 66 California fuchsia and noticed its bright green stems twining their way through the gray-green sage. The effect, a bit unkempt and wild, is very much to my liking.

Another example of this mingling of plants occurs in my shade garden. Here, too, limited sunlight has resulted in lean plants. A toyon *(Heteromeles arbutifolia)* is growing fairly close to a Claremont currant (*Ribes* 'Claremont'). The stems of both coalesce, filling in the space. My hope now is that as the toyon grows in height, the Claremont currant will fill in the space below the canopy. When I planted them, however, I was not thinking of this or how they would interweave as they started growing. With this new understanding of the toyon-currant friendship, I carefully select and prune branches to guide these plants into a harmonious adult relationship.

And finally, consider the striking combination of soft, delicate wildflowers growing in my garden among sharp blades of chaparral yucca (*Hesperoyucca whipplei*). This combination is temporary, but lovely just the same. Ephemeral wildflowers, interspersed with more permanent neighbors, fraternize in different ways. Some overshadow low-growing shrubs and perennials, others infiltrate open spaces, and still others nuzzle up to those adjacent to them.

All of these examples from my garden were unplanned, but they have led me to think about the placement of plants in a new way. I now concentrate more on the interface between plants and try to visualize what will happen when two neighbors reach out towards each other.

This is, of course, just another level of garden design. When planning gardens, one must think about individual plants. Are they appropriate for the space? Do they have desirable color, shape, and texture? One must also step back and think about the whole garden. How do the background, mid-section, and foreground of the garden relate to each other? Are there paths to draw the eye along? Are there focal points for the eye to rest upon? And lastly, one should ask, how will neighboring plants play together?

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**Barbara Eisenstein** is the horticulture outreach coordinator at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. Since arriving in California 10 years ago, her yard has been morphing from a turf-dominated garden into a wild native landscape.

*[Note: Plant California natives wisely. Protect rare and endangered species and prevent gene pool contamination by using locally grown species in the landscape. Avoid using invasive plants, whether native or introduced.* [http://www.cnps.org/cnps/archive/landscaping.php]





Both photos by Barbara Eisenstein.

**Left: Clarkia wildflowers twining through sharp blades of chaparral yucca. Right: Route 66 California fuchsia climbing through the stems of Pozo Blue sage.**

## New Field Guide on Sedges

The Carex Working Group is pleased to announce the publication of the *Field Guide to the Sedges of the Pacific Northwest*. The book is an illustrated guide to all 164 species, subspecies, and varieties of Carex that occur in Washington and Oregon. Botanists will find it useful throughout much of California, particularly in northern California and in the mountains throughout the state. It contains identification keys, descriptions, color photographs, and distribution maps for each species, along with information about sedge ecology, habitat, and management.



The field guide is available now by calling 800-426-3797, or it can be ordered by going to *http://oregonstate.edu/dept/press/e-f/FieldGuideSedges.html* and then clicking on "Secure online ordering form."

## Symposium on Waterwise Native Gardens

A two-day symposium titled "Growing Natives: Celebrating California's Beauty in Dry Times" will be held March 28 and 29, 2009 in the East Bay cities of Lafayette and Berkeley. The symposium will teach participants how to create beautiful, water-wise gardens using California native plants.

Saturday's program includes six speakers—Glenn Keator, Carol Bornstein, Phil Van Soelen, Roger Raiche, David Amme, and Mike Evans—plus a continental breakfast, lunch, and wine reception. Sunday's program begins with a talk by Steve Edwards, followed by a choice of workshops in the botanic garden, a visit to Native Here Nursery, and to two spectacular private gardens.

The event is being cosponsored by CNPS, the Friends of the Regional Parks Botanic Garden, and *Pacific Horticulture*. For more information and to register, visit www.nativeplants.org or call 510-849-1627.

## Next Chapter Council Meeting

(Details available at: *http://cnps.org/cnps/admin/cc/*)

**SAT., MAR. 14, 2009 – RSA BOTANIC GARDEN, CLAREMONT**
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CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
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