

Red-tail News

Issue 52 April 2021

WELCOME TO EDITION 52 OF RED-TAIL NEWS.

Welcome to the first edition of Red-tail News for 2021.

We hope that everyone had a lovely Christmas and enjoyed a great start to the New Year. With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria, more of our project staff have been able to resume working on their normal recovery activities. We were even able to attend our first regional event in almost a year setting up a Red-tail stall at the Mundulla Show in early March, which provided a great opportunity to touch base again with the local community.

In this edition of Red-tail News we will hear from Claudia-Helena Giraldo-Escobar who is starting a Masters project this year focusing on stringybark phenology and biogeography, as well as Abigail Goodman with news about the recent 'Communities Helping Cockies' bus tour in Lucindale.

We will also hear from Liz Beever with updates about the Glenelg Pine project in Victoria, and Andrew Bradey with news about the Kowree Farm Tree Group's activities for the past year.

After having to adapt last year's annual Red-tail count to a backyard/property counting event due to COVID-19, we are excited the full Annual Cocky Count can return in 2021 and we're seeking volunteers to assist. More information can be found in the newsletter.

We would also like to acknowledge the community affected by the recent bushfires. Earlier this year a bushfire burned through Avenue Range, Blackford and Lucindale, burning over 14,000 ha of farmland, plantation, and native habitat.

Our hearts go out to everyone impacted by the fires and in particular would like to mention members of the Red-tail recovery community who were personally affected and/or involved in the firefighting effort. The bushfire recovery effort is underway and we will support the community's efforts where we can.

We hope you enjoy reading our selection of stories and look forward to bringing you the latest Red-tail news throughout the year.

Thanks, Kelsey



Photo credit: Luke Leddy

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birds are in our nature




birdlife
AUSTRALIA

THE ANNUAL COCKY COUNT RETURNS IN 2021!

After having to adapt last year's Annual Count to a backyard/property counting event due to COVID-19, the Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia are again seeking your valuable assistance to head outside and search for Red-tails! This year the 2021 Annual Count will be conducted on Saturday 1 May.

The Recovery Team is hoping to see a great turnout of volunteers to assist in locating as many flocks as possible across south-eastern South Australia and south-western Victoria in stringybark forest.

While the count can return this year there have been several new rules introduced to the event to ensure it is in line with government health regulations and guarantee the health and safety of participants. For instance all vehicles must carry hand sanitiser and participants can only search an area in the state where they live.

The method of the count however will be the same as previous years. All you need is a partner/friend or small group, binoculars, a love of the outdoors and a vehicle, preferably 4WD. Volunteers will search their allocated site, stopping their vehicle regularly to look and listen out for the distinctive call of the Red-tails.

No prior experience is needed for surveying the birds, but volunteers are required to become familiar with what the Red-tails look and sound like to be able to distinguish them from the more common Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, as these birds are often mistaken for each other. To hear the difference between the two visit our website where you can listen to a range of calls at www.redtail.com.au.

There are over 60 sites in stringybark that volunteers can search, ranging from Keith to Mount Gambier in South Australia and Little Desert to Nelson in Victoria. Landholders with stringybark on their property are also encouraged to search their own land. You can request a particular area to search when you register or nominate to search your own property.

The main reason for conducting the annual count each year is to identify large flocks of Red-tails across the range. Flock counts are undertaken each year after the annual count using the location of these large flocks to gain an indication of breeding success in previous years.

An annual count training session will be held the morning of the count in Casterton for those who need some tips on how to find birds, or those who haven't participated in the count before. This session is a great way to learn what Red-tails look and sound like, how to identify signs of feeding, and how to tell apart stringybark habitat from other gum woodland habitats. An Annual count training video is also in development for those participants who are unable to attend the training session, which will be uploaded to the website in the lead up to the count.

Unfortunately we have decided to cancel the Annual Bailey's Rocks campout this year. We know that many volunteers look forward to the campout as a way to relax after a busy day of counting cockies and to share stories with others. However, the health and safety of our volunteers must come first, and the decision has been made in the best interests of all. Cross your fingers it can make a triumphant return in 2022.

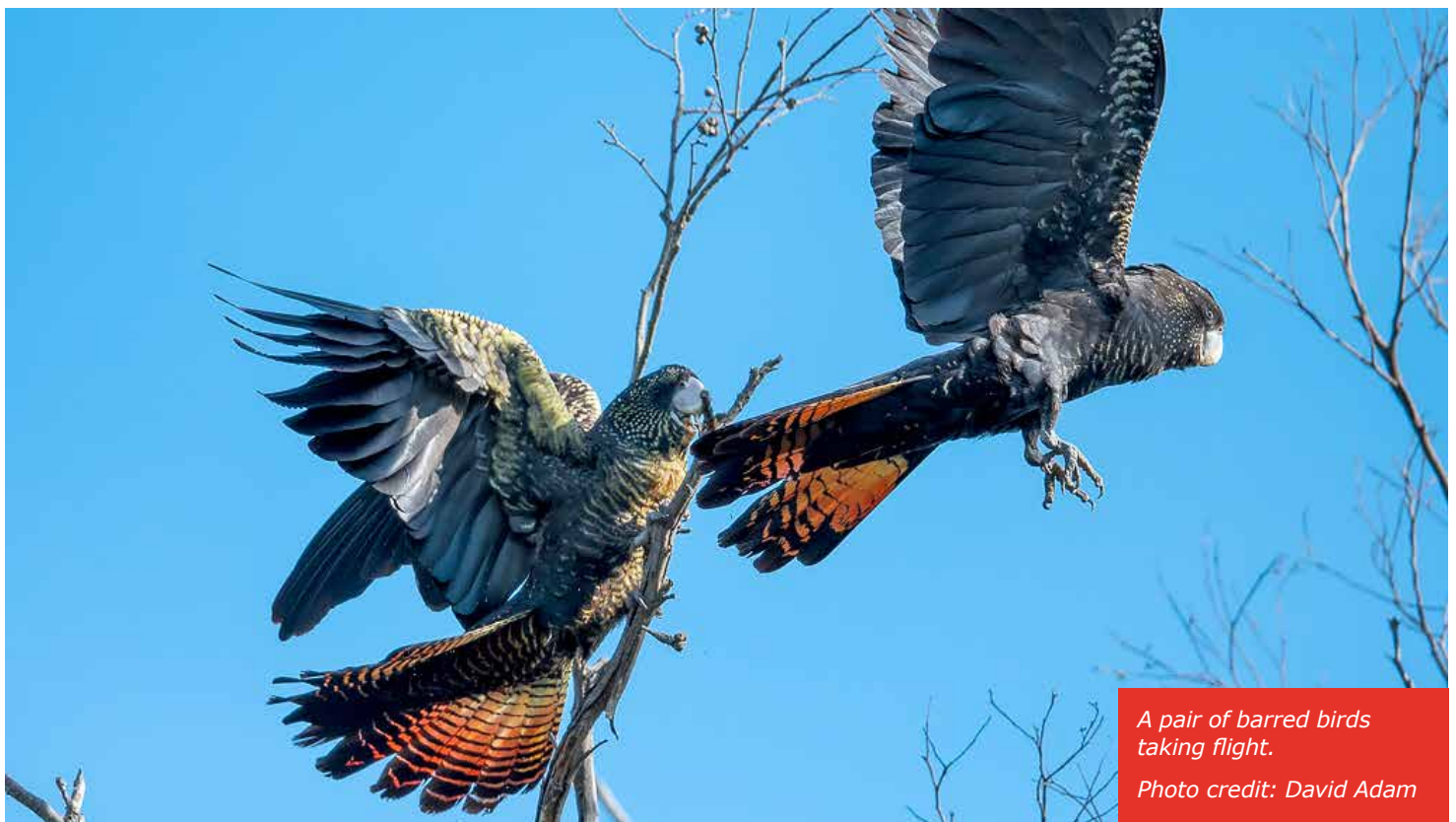
To register your interest or find out more information please contact Kelsey Bennett on 1800 262 062, via email redtail@birdlife.org.au, or visit our website at www.redtail.com.au.

Registrations are taken up to two weeks prior to the count; however we recommend registering early to secure your preferred search area. A package of survey instructions and a map will be sent out to registered volunteers in the fortnight leading up to the count.

We also want participants to be aware that if there are further restrictions or lockdowns due to COVID-19, then new rules will be introduced accordingly to ensure the health and safety of participants. In an extreme situation we may need to cancel the event at the last minute.

Lastly, while we do hope to cover as many sites as possible we do understand that some of our volunteers are in the high-risk category for transmission of the coronavirus. We urge everyone to consider their health and safety and that of their families first before deciding whether to take part in the count or not. We will be continuing to hold more Annual Counts in later years so there will be many more opportunities to partake in the future!

Kelsey Bennett



A pair of barred birds taking flight.

Photo credit: David Adam



REPORT YOUR SIGHTINGS TO THE RED-TAIL RECOVERY TEAM

The Recovery Team is again urging all members of the public to report any sightings of the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (Red-tails) in preparation for the 2021 Annual Cocky Count.

At this time each year we call upon members of the public and landholders to report all sightings of Red-tails to assist us to determine where the cockies are currently located and maximise the number of birds counted on the day by strategically placing our volunteer effort.

We are particularly interested in reports of Red-tails drinking at troughs or dams, as this is where we tend to count larger numbers of birds.

The success of the count relies heavily on this information. If you see any Red-tails between now and early May, please get in contact and let us know. It will make all the difference; call us on freecall 1800 262 062 or get in touch via the website www.redtail.com.au.

When reporting a sighting, make sure to include your contact details, the date and time of the sighting, an estimate of the number of Red-tails observed, the location and grid reference for the sighting and some information about what the birds were doing eg drinking from trough, feeding.

We look forward to receiving your reports!

A female Red-tail feeding on stringybark seeds.

Photo credit: Kelsey Bennett

NEW RESEARCH PROJECT FOCUSING ON PHENOLOGY OF STRINGYBARK SPECIES

Hi, my name is Claudia-Helena Giraldo-Escobar. I completed the equivalent of an Australian Honour's degree in Forest Engineering at the National University of Colombia. It is through studying for this degree that my passion was ignited for forest ecology and its dynamics. During my career, I have had the opportunity to work in and carry out research on many different ecosystems, from highland oak forests to mangroves and deserts, as well as working in cartography, land planning, and forest management.

The research I am starting in March of 2021, supervised by Associate Professor Craig Nitschke, will investigate the biogeography and phenology of two very similar species of eucalypts, *Eucalyptus baxteri* and *E. arenacea*, on which the Red-tails feed. These species can only be differentiated by their phenology patterns, which will be studied and used to better understand the geographical distribution of each one in the south-west of Victoria. I will examine how the variability of environmental factors such as temperature and precipitation affect the timing as well as the abundance of flowering and seed production for each species. The overall aim is to be able to model the spatial and temporal availability of Red-tail stringybark foraging resources under current and future climate change scenarios.

I am sure this experience will not only provide vital information to support the effective conservation of Red-tails but will also be highly rewarding for myself.

Claudia-Helena Giraldo-Escobar



Claudia-Helena conducting work in the field. Photo credit: Anu Singh

KOWREE FARM TREE GROUP: THE PAST YEAR

The on-ground activities pertinent to Red-tailed Black Cockatoo conservation are:

CEP Project

A federally funded project where we fenced off areas of private land and planted Desert Stringybarks. The project was called 'Restoration of the South-east Red-tail Black Cockatoo Feeding Habitat' and was part of the Communities Environment Program and funded via our local federal member of parliament, Dr Anne Webster. We organised the planting of 1,100 stringybarks and 280 Bulokes on four properties.

An unusual constraint of this project was that all plantings had to occur within the federal electorate of Mallee. One of the properties was right on the boundary and so only certain paddocks qualified!

Private Land Conservation

Our group KPCN (KPCN stands for: dudes who own land which they manage for conservation) had to cancel their May get-together, but somehow negotiated the COVID-19 rules to manage an October gathering at Roy & Lynn Pails' property near Clear Lake. The Pails' are reptile fanatics, and own lots. At this gathering there were lots of face-masks and hand sanitiser, however social distancing was well and truly enforced by the biggest, fattest Tiger Snake on the planet, which Roy eased out of a sack into our circle of (occupied) deck-chairs. We all very quickly moved back!!!

Individually Guarded Paddock Trees

The other thing on our list was the replacement of deceased paddock trees from previous years plantings. There were quite a few required.

Ruminations on Individually Guarded Paddock Trees

The Kowree Farm Tree Group has mucked about with individually guarded paddock trees in the region for several years. The main benefits of this activity are that it enables us to put a value on existing paddock trees and it has forced us to think very carefully about paddock tree conservation.

What we have discovered with our work is that:

- The cost of planting individually guarded trees is about 10 times as much as trees planted within a fenced off enclosure. I am calling this a cost differential.

- It is impossible to provide the same standard of soil preparation and weed control to individually guarded trees compared with block plantings. As a result, people need to be prepared to hand-weed and water trees through summer.
- The mortality rate of individually guarded trees is considerably higher than trees within a fenced-off enclosure. So, with time the cost differential increases as less guarded trees survive and need to be replaced.
- When you plant a tree, it is to achieve some benefit into the future. You need to consider what it will cost in 20 years for Stringybarks to feed Red-tails, 70 years for Bulokes to feed Red-tails and 200+ years for nest hollows to form. Because of the ever-growing cost differential time means money, any benefit which takes more than 20 years to achieve is fantastically expensive.
- Land use has a major influence on how quickly individually guarded trees fizzle out. Hobby farmers have the lowest rates of mortality. Among commercial farmers, sheep grazing has the lowest mortality, while cattle farmers and croppers are off the chart.
- Ironically it is commercial graziers (definitely not croppers) who are the most enthusiastic about having paddock trees planted on their land, but these people generally have poor success in retaining them.
- The most cost-effective scenario where individually guarded paddock trees may be worth planting is Stringybarks on a hobby farm. It takes about 20 years to achieve a result. The owners will 'coddle' their trees and few will die. Most other options are very expensive if they are to achieve their conservation goals.
- If commercial farmers want to grow individually guarded paddock trees it needs to be for a quick pay-off such as shade or shelter. The species planted needs to be fast growing, long lived and unpalatable to whatever species of livestock they happen to run. The farmer needs to be motivated to do the work and keep the annual number of trees planted low, so that they can manage the weeding, and watering (and replacing) which will be required.
- Once large old paddock trees are lost, there is no easy way to replace them. Slowing their inevitable demise is a far more effective use of limited conservation resources, than kidding yourself that it is possible to replace.

Andrew Bradey



Roy Pails with a large tiger snake at the KPCN get-together in October 2020. Photo credit: Euan Moore

CELEBRATIONS FOR 'COMMUNITIES HELPING COCKIES' PROJECT

'Communities Helping Cockies' is a five-year project that is funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and delivered in partnership with the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, Birdlife Australia, Trees for Life and Zoos SA. The project delivers on ground actions that contribute significantly to the revegetation and management of valuable Red-tail habitat on private and public land in south-east South Australia.

The start of 2021 marked the halfway point for the project and to celebrate the progress made so far, the project partners invited the new Limestone Coast Landscape Board and South East Aboriginal Focus Group members to join them on a bus tour to some of the project sites. The tour showcased examples of local schools' involvement in revegetation, partnership plantings with industry groups, areas where revegetation is linking remnant feeding habitat at a landscape scale, strategic landscape weed control and one of the original planting sites which really underlined what can be achieved.

The Board were very interested to learn about the ways in which the project engages and works with landholders and the community and the results that have been achieved. They were also keen to hear about the way that the South-eastern Red-tailed Black Cockatoo Recovery Team supports the work of the project, with the expertise and scientific knowledge of the team informing the placement and delivery of the on-ground actions.

The recent Blackford bushfire threatened Red-tail habitat around Avenue Range and Lucindale but fortunately had minimal impact on feeding habitat. The bus tour provided a good opportunity to start a discussion about the threats posed by fire and what steps can be taken to prepare for future fires.

The 'Communities Helping Cockies' project builds on the great work of the community and other program partners over many years. The bus tour celebrations highlighted that the longevity of the project work, the commitment of the people and community involved and the networks that exist across industry, government and community provide great strength to the successful and on-going recovery efforts for the species.

Abigail Goodman, Project Coordinator – Communities Helping Cockies with the Limestone Coast Landscape Board.



Project partners and supporters listening to a presentation by Kids Helping Cockies coordinator Bronwyn Perryman. Photo credit: Lu-Wei Spinks



Auntie Penny and Doug conducting a smoking ceremony after the bus tour. Photo credit: Lu-Wei Spinks



The cockies group celebrating a wonderful day out! Photo credit: Lu-Wei Spinks

UPDATE ON GLENELG PINE PROJECT

The goal for the Glenelg Pine project which commenced in 2018 and spans over three years is to target pine wilding invasion on public land. Aiming to treat 3,780ha of public land, from the Lower Glenelg National Park in the south and as far north as the Dergholm State Park, the project aims to improve and protect stringybark woodlands ensuring habitat for Red-tails. The project is funded under the State Government's Biodiversity Response Plan as part of Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037.

Pine wildings are considered a long-term threatening process to the Far South West's biodiversity. Pine wildings outcompete native species such as the Brown stringybark and Desert stringybark, which are key habitat species for Red-tails. Wildings are fast growing and transported through several vectors, removing them from the landscape will reverse eucalypt canopy loss and result in overall biodiversity increase. A study Area of Interest (AOI) was mapped which included 3824 km² from the eastern edge of Lower Glenelg National Park to the South Australian border and northward to Beniagh Swamp Wildlife Reserve (to the west of Dergholm). Mapping indicated approximately 19% of the AOI is directly impacted by emergent wilding canopy or has recruiting (invading) wildings.

We have reached the goal (January 2021) with a total of 4672ha treated. This included 498ha of high infestation sites and approximately 2932ha of follow up treatment. This was achieved through mechanical delivery which involved harvesting machines removing the pine trees, while manual options included a mixture of felling, lopping and herbicide. A great achievement was the follow up Pine wilding work in areas impacted by 2019-2020 bushfires such as Weecurra State Forest. The works achieved by all involved thus far has been invaluable to the rejuvenation of landscapes, regaining woodland ecosystems, and greatly benefiting flora and fauna including Red-tails.

The project was previously led by Project Officer Katrina Shawcroft with the recent addition of Elizabeth Beever, who will now continue the work as the new Glenelg Pine Project Officer. The work undertaken over the past two years has been very impressive and you can see the changes and benefits to the landscape that has been targeted already. With monitoring and follow up, the project will continue to protect the native species that come back and thrive after the large-scale removal of the pines.

Moving forward the aim is to continue to focus on treatment areas that will most benefit Red-tails. The Glenelg Pine Project is continuing to link in with other organisations to get the best result for Red-tails. Relationships with Greening Australia and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority aim to possibly revegetate key areas that have been previously burnt and had follow up pine wilding treatment. The project is also working with Gunditj Mirringai Traditional Owners Cooperation to provide chemical and chainsaw training to their works crew.

*Pine control work completed as part of the
Glenelg Pine Project
Photo credit: DELWP*



A RARE SIGHTING OF A LEUCISTIC RED-TAIL

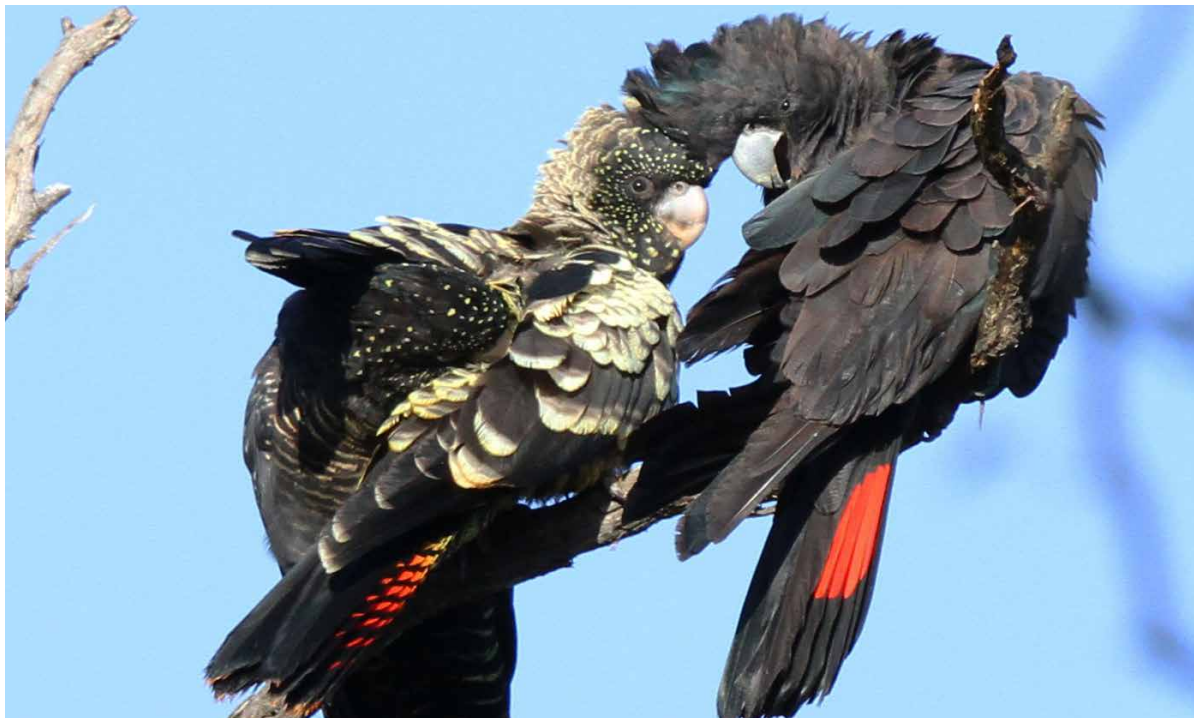
The Red-tail Recovery Team was alerted to a very rare sighting of a leucistic juvenile Red-tail spotted near Edenhope last year. The bird was spotted by Meagan Lonsdale who managed to capture these lovely images of the family.

Leucism is caused by a genetic mutation that prevents pigment from being properly displayed on a bird's feathers. This can result in plumage that is completely white in colour, to pale or diluted colouration. Leucism has been seen in many Australian birds including magpies, currawongs and even Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos.

While there have been other records of Red-tails with leucism, the Team has never seen a bird like this before! Meagan also noted that the juvenile appeared to be gradually moulting out to regular black-spotted feathers, so it's possible that the cocky will eventually look like a normal bird.



A juvenile Red-tail with leucism. Photo credit: Meagan Lonsdale



Hanging out as a family

Photo credit: Meagan Lonsdale

2021 MUNDULLA SHOW

The Red-tail Recovery Team attended the 2021 Mundulla Show held on Saturday 6 March this year. After the cancellation of so many local events and field days last year, project coordinator Kelsey Bennett was very excited to be able to set up the Red-tail stall again and chat with the community about the recovery project.

The weather was fantastic on Saturday and the show had a great turnout of landholders and members of the public with hundreds of visitors passing through the gates, many of whom stopped by for a friendly chat and to learn more about the cockies. The kids who visited the stall were given temporary tattoos, Red-tail cards and stickers, and loved seeing our female cocky model. There was much interest from the adults as well, with people stopping to report their sightings and to sign up for the Annual Count.

Although the Lucindale Field Days were cancelled this year the Recovery Team is hoping that we'll be able to attend other shows later in the year, so keep an eye out for our Red-tail stall at future events!

A big thank you to the Limestone Coast Landscape Board for inviting us to set up our stall in their tent and for providing assistance on the day.



The Red-tail stall at the Mundulla Show. Photo credit: Kelsey Bennett



FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

BirdLife Australia's SERTBC Recovery Program is supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority and Wimmera Catchment Management Authority in partnership with Trees For Life, Zoos SA, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Barengi Gadgin Land Council and Kowree Farm Tree Group through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

Red-tails drinking from a trough on a Lucindale property that were counted as part of the flock counts

Photo: Kelsey Bennett

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Kelsey Bennett

Project Coordinador, South Eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team

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