

THE

LATERAL LINE

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On the Cover: Pam Chin, a great friend of the HCCC, made a return trip to Lake Malawi this autumn. If you look at her cap you will see that she is busy promoting our club all around the world! Thanks Pam for all that you do! Cover photo courtesy of Larry Johnson.

Editorial

What an incredible run of weather we've had! It's so nice to be able to sleep with the windows open again. I love this small window we get in the fall and spring.

We had our fall auction at a new location earlier this month. The facility was excellent. It offers more room than we are used to as well as convenient location and a kitchen area. I think after we get a couple events in here that our turnout will be great.

The annual Christmas party is just around the corner. We are aiming for the first Saturday of December and still trying to solidify a location. Keep an eye on the HCCC forum's Members Section for more information. Dr. Michael Kidd will be speaking on Malawian cichlids including video footage of his trips there. He is a fantastic speaker and someone you don't want to miss.

The big club news of course centers around our 2011 convention FOTAS CARES. See the flyer on the following page for a listing of speakers! Expect the hotel location to be locked in by Christmas.

We have a new FOTAS President. HCCC member Charles Jones is now heading the Federation of Texas Aquarium Societies. I am part of the support crew and will assist Charles in my role of Vice President. Your

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HCCC FOTAS rep is Diane Tennison. You may come to any of us with any queries about FOTAS that you might have.

This issue of the Lateral Line contains an informative account of the CARES species *Pungu maclareni* by Troy Veltrop, our CARES chairman. Troy has an impressive collection of cichlids and I can only hope that this will be the first of many great articles featuring his fish.

Benjamin Smith shares his experiences with *Cryptoheros* sp. "Honduran red point". Benjamin has been a prolific contributor to the pages of the Lateral Line with quality articles. I really appreciate his submissions because, as editor, I realize most of his articles could easily be appearing in any aquarium magazine.

Finally, Keith Arnold, long time Texas aquatic legend, reports on a cool West African snail eating cichlid *Thysochromis ansorgii*. This species was one of those cool auction finds that he found success with. That's all for now, see you next month.



FOTAS CARES

60TH ANNUAL FEDERATION OF TEXAS AQUARIUM SOCIETIES CONVENTION



San Antonio Texas, November 4th –6th 2011.

A world class speaker lineup including Melanie Stiassny, Charles Jones, Ad Konings, Paul V. Loiselle, Kathy England, Les Kaufman and Anton Lamboj. Fish show, Banquet, Auction, Babes in the Cichlid Hobby and much, much more! Something for every aquarist!

For more information visit

www.hillcountrycichlidclub.com.

The Barambi Mbo Sponge Eater *Pungu maclareni* (Trewavas 1962)

-Troy Veltrop

Reprinted from *Buntbarsche Bulletin*, official publication of the American Cichlid Association, Inc. (ACA).



A close up shot showing the specialized teeth of *Pungu maclareni*. Photo by Dave Hansen.

The Way of the Dodo?

Extinction: “To go the way of the dodo,” as they say. Fighting extinction is the woeful plight of too many of our beloved cichlids. A quandary that can, more often than not, be attributed to the species *Homo sapiens* and our unsustainable use of natural resources, before it can be attributed to natural causes.

One tiny crater lake, Barombi Mbo, in Western Cameroon is home to eleven species of cichlids that mankind has put in this dilemma. Eleven! All of them are endemic to this lake. There is also a great deal of other aquatic life that is endemic to the lake, ranging from freshwater sponges to a mudfish named *Clarias maclareni*. The only place in the world where these species are found in the wild is in this lake, Barombi Mbo, and it is at risk along with its inhabitants. Conservation of the lake is, of course, paramount, but you are the cichlids’ only chance at sur-

vival if the conservation efforts at the lake should fail. Since there are not a great deal of conservation efforts underway at the lake, and the situation will likely worsen before it gets better, the cichlids need you desperately.

Eleven Species of Cichlids. So What?

You may muse. “Aren’t there places like Lake Victoria with far more species in peril where we should focus our efforts?” the conservation aware hobbyist may ask. “The cichlids of that lake and other regions are certainly at risk also.” Ah, but you see, it is in its small size where the treasure lies for evolutionary biologists.

Small Lake, Huge Treasure

At the young age of about one million years old, Lake Barombi Mbo has a total surface area of 415 hectares (1,025 acres) and is 111 meters (364 ft) in depth. However, only the

first 40 meters (131 ft) contain enough oxygen to support the cichlids. Although the largest of the crater lakes in Cameroon, it is really a small lake. Allow me to put its size into perspective. Lake Malawi, for example, has a surface area of 29,600 square kilometers (18,393 square miles), Lake Tanganyika is 32,900 square kilometers (20,443 square miles) in surface area, Lake Victoria con-

save possibly Lake Bermin, offers: the highest endemic species per hectare ratio known to biologists, and one of the few examples where such a small area has supported the evolution of new species by means of sympatric speciation (two or more descendant species produced under isolation within the same area, with no geographical barriers). It is thought that a riverine species, *Sarothero-*



***Pungu maclareni* in typical coloration. Photo by Dave Hansen.**

sumes 68,800 square kilometers (42,750 square miles), and the state of Texas is a whopping 678,354 square kilometers (421,510 square miles). By converting Lake Barombi Mbo's surface area of 415 hectares to equal units of measure, you will find it has a surface area of only a little over four square kilometers (2.5 miles).

Although only a mere drop in the bucket in size comparison, Lake Barombi Mbo offers two things that no other lake in the world,

don galilaeus, colonized the lake and evolved into the eleven cichlid species found there today. In the field of evolutionary biology, the lake is considered as important as the Galapagos Islands. Now those four square kilometers and eleven species of cichlids are not looking so small and insignificant, are they?

The Cichlids of Barombi Mbo

By now, you are surely asking yourself, "Who are these cichlids and what can I do to

help?” I applauded you for asking. So, without further ado, I present to you the cichlids of Barombi Mbo.

• **Genus: *Konia***

First, the genus *Konia*, which contains *K. dikume* and *K. eisentrauti*. Both prefer open water; however, *K. dikume* likes it much deeper, at 20 meters (66 ft) and greater, where there are low oxygen levels in the water. *K. dikume* prefers mosquito larvae, whereas *K. eisentrauti* likes a more varied diet consisting of algae, fish eggs, and small insects.

• **Genus: *Myaka***

Then there is the monotypic genus *Myaka*, with *M. myaka*, a fine particle feeder that feeds on the phytoplankton in the open water column. *M. myaka* is also reported to eat small insects.

• **Genus: *Pungu***

There is yet another monotypic genus, *Pungu*, with *P. maclareni*, which is a highly specialized freshwater sponge eater.

• **Genus: *Sarotherodon***

Four members of the *Sarotherodon* genus also call the lake home. They are *S. caroli*, *S. linnellii*, *S. lohbergeri*, and *S. steinbachi*, all of which are primarily phytoplankton feeders living in different areas of the lake.

• **Genus: *Stomatepia***

Lastly, the genus *Stomatepia*, consisting of *S. mariae*, *S. mongo*, and *S. pindu*. Members of the genus *Stomatepia* feed primarily on shrimp and insect larvae; however, *S. mariae* also eats small fish. So, there they are folks; 11 endemic cichlid species from which to choose. Which will it be? I have decided to work with as many species from the lake as I can acquire, and both *Myaka myaka* and *Pungu maclareni* currently grace my fishroom. If their status changes to

‘Extinct in the wild,’ will future generations also be able to look to your tanks to see the only living specimens? They will mine, and I would now like to tell you a bit about one of my favorites, *Pungu maclareni*, in hopes of enticing you to do the same.

They Call Me Mellow Yellow

One of the most colorful fish from Lake Barombi Mbo, *P. maclareni*, or ‘pungu,’ as known by the natives, has a yellow base color with black splotches all over the body. Depending on the viewing angle, one can also see hints of silvery-grey and a light silver-blue. The black spots are also randomly scattered on all fins, with the exception of the pectorals, which for the most part lack any markings. Black streaking is also visible in the pelvic, dorsal, anal, and caudal fins. The very most outer edges of the dorsal and caudal fins are sometimes edged with a light red-orange color.

Both males and females have a black cheek and throat with the black being more prominent in the males. During both spawning and periods of slumber, the black coloration becomes more intense. Yellow-golden spots also sometimes appear smack in the middle of the operculum. Not only are no two specimens ever marked the same, no single fish is ever marked identically on the right side and the left side. This unique pattern of markings among specimens makes it rather easy to identify and track individual fish.

While pungu is the name used by the locals, ‘mellow yellow’ would certainly be fitting as well, for this is the most peaceful cichlid I have ever kept. Every time I sit looking into the tank and see the colony peacefully cruising around, I begin to sing, “They call me mellow yellow,” and a strange calm washes over me. The troubles of the day fall away and I lose myself in their slow deliberate movements. They appear completely at

peace and are oblivious to the chaos of their tankmates, *M. myaka*. The pingu are my 'hippie fish' and represent the yang to *M. myaka*'s yin.

Another quite amusing behavioral trait is their propensity to do 'headstands' while feeding. Reports from friends to whom I have sent fry, as well as observations in my own fishroom, have noted this behavior in both adults and juveniles. It is quite a sight to see a large school of *P. maclareni* standing on their heads, perfectly perpendicular, methodically picking through the substrate or tearing algae from a rock surface.

Although I keep my colony of 11 in a 470-liter (125-gallon) aquarium, mainly due to the five *M. myaka*, I venture

to guess one could house a decent sized colony in as small as a 150-liter (40-gallon) aquarium. Only during spawning have I ever witnessed any aggression and it is usually in the form of tail bashing, mild chasing, and gill flaring. The tail bashing behavior is quite entertaining to watch and can be observed in both males and females. Two fish, usually of the same sex, will display to each other with their heads aligned with the other's tail. Then they proceed to smack each other with their tails while swimming in circles, gills flaring. Never have I witnessed any damage done, not even so much as a torn or nipped fin, and they are almost oblivious to any other fish in the tank.



***Pungu maclareni* feed on algae covered rocks as well as freshwater sponges.**

The first photo of *P. maclareni* I saw was taken by Dave Hansen. It was a great close-up shot of the pingu's amazing set of teeth. However, this appearance is in stark contrast to its demeanor. Judging by those teeth, you might think *P. maclareni* to be a fierce carnivore but instead it uses these teeth and strong jaw muscles for a much more specialized purpose: dining on the freshwater sponges that are also endemic to the lake.

While it will also use them to tear into sunken wood looking for insect larvae, this must make up a small part of the diet, for if you feed it large quantities of animal protein, it will quickly succumb to problems of the intestinal tract. This is why it is recommended to provide *P. maclareni* with a herbivorous diet that includes a

sprinkling of insect larvae and crustaceans as the occasional treat.

Maintenance

The aquarium that houses my *P. maclareni* has a sand and pea gravel mixture for substrate, and piles of rock and a few pieces of driftwood make up the decor. The pH of the water is about 8.2 and the KH and GH are around 250 ppm (mg/L). I don't mess with my water; it comes from the well this way. Tank maintenance is simple and quick. Once a week I do a 50 to 70 percent water change, vacuum the gravel, and clean the front glass. Filtration is accomplished with two hang-on filters that I also clean during the water

change. I rinse the bio media in some of the tank water that I have drained into a bucket and squeeze out the sponge. Unless there is an impeller blockage or one of the intake tubes is plugged up, I do not clean the filter any further except to wipe down the outside housing.

Breeding of the Pungu

When I first decided to get a colony of *P. maclareni*, I was under the impression that they had never been bred in the aquarium and I set out to be the first. Unbeknownst to me, Dr. Paul Loiselle had already accomplished this feat ten years earlier in 1999. When I finally stumbled across the account of his trials, I was at least relieved to know that he had experienced some of the same issues I was facing. They just flat refused to breed, and when they finally did they would never carry to full term. It was by sheer accident that I found the key to the successful breeding of *P. maclareni*: 86° F + temperatures!

I would never have guessed to increase the temperature in the tank that high, but as luck would have it, spring had rolled around and I had not yet properly adjusted the heaters in my fishroom. I heat the room and not the individual tanks. Temperatures in the room soared to 100° F and all my tanks shot up to just over 86° F. On April 14 of 2010 I looked into the tank and saw several adult *P. maclareni* trying to get at something hiding under a piece of driftwood. They were fry! There weren't many left since it seems that *P. maclareni* is an opportunistic feeder and will dine on its young if given the chance. That day I managed to save eight tiny fry, each about 9 mm (0.35 in) in length. From that day forward the *P. maclareni* would not stop spawning and about a month later I had two more fish ready to release. This time, two pairs had spawned and I had one male and one female holding. I know they were two

separate pairs as I watched the preludes to their spawning a few weeks prior. I was unable to photograph the events because they become incredibly skittish during this time and would abandon the spawning ritual as soon as they saw me approach the tank with my camera. Once again, both of them spit in the tank. The male had spit sometime earlier that day while I was absent and the fry were hiding under a piece of driftwood. As I was trying to catch the still holding female, she made a couple of laps around the tank, and I swear, looked right at me and spit a cloud of little ones in my face. Fending off the other fish in the tank the best I could while trying to net out the little ones, I successfully retrieved about 60 fry. Then again, about a month later, another 30 were added to the grow-out tank, this batch from the exact same pair that provided me with the first eight and half of the spawn a month prior. To this day, both pairs still spawn with their chosen mate, a behavior which supports Dr. Loiselle's hypothesis that *P. maclareni* mate monogamously.

I have made another observation which supports a hypothesis of Dr. Loiselle's. In January of 2003, Cichlid News magazine published an article by Dr. Loiselle entitled, 'The Aquarium Husbandry of the Pungu, *Pungu maclareni*.' In his article he mentions how the other wild caught Barombi Mbo cichlids he had as tankmates of the *P. maclareni* would almost totally ignore the *pungu* except when they (the other species) began to spawn. Then they would chase the *P. maclareni* away with great enthusiasm. He noted how this aggression towards *P. maclareni* would reach its peak just moments before the other species actually spawned. He speculated that *P. maclareni* might exhibit some egg robbing behavior that we did not know about.

One night, while doing water changes, I no-

ticed what looked like a feeding frenzy in the corner of the Barombi Mbo tank. As I crept ever nearer to the corner of the 125-gallon they call home, I noticed what appeared to be two *P. maclareni* attempting to spawn. Indeed, the female, buccal cavity partially bulging with eggs, was circling with a male doing the 'fish dance.' Above and all around them were the other nine *P. maclareni* in a complete frenzy. They were pushing, shoving, and chasing, all of them trying to get at the eggs that the female was laying. Those of us who have kept *P. maclareni* know how peaceful they are so this behavior was reminiscent of a barroom brawl. They swam hurriedly around the spawning area, picking up any gravel or sand particles that were egg-sized, and raced off with them, only to spit mid tank and race back to the spawning site to repeat the process.

The female, two hours later, came up for food and was devoid of eggs. I have no idea what happened to the eggs she was holding. I assume the swarm of *P. maclareni* interrupted the spawning process and the eggs were never fertilized. Possibly she spit them as she was being harassed by the other *P. maclareni*. I have twice now witnessed this behavior. Neither time have I actually seen *P. maclareni* rob the eggs but there is a great deal of circumstantial evidence to support that is what had happened. Fry of *P. maclareni* look nothing at all like their parents, at least in coloration. The body shape is there but the black speckling and black coloration on the throat, chin, and operculum are absent for over three months after they are free swimming. The eight fry released in mid April were just starting to develop some black coloration when I sent them down to the Hill Country Cichlid Club at the end of July of this year. The remaining fry from the May and June spawns are a dull silvery-yellow color, although there are signs of the

red edging on the dorsal and caudal fins. The fry are slow growing despite their voracious appetites for baby brine shrimp and crushed spirulina flake, and are an absolute joy to watch.

One Person Cannot Save Them All, But We Can All Save Just One!

In conclusion, I would like to say how enjoyable it has been for me to keep *P. maclareni* in my fishroom. They are a worthy addition to any cichlid collection, especially if you happen to focus on fish included on the C.A.R.E.S. Preservation Program Conservation Priority Species at Risk List. The fish on this list may one day be gone and it is of the utmost importance for us to maintain captive populations. *Pungu maclareni* is on this list as Critically Endangered and is a peaceful, easy to maintain fish. So rush out and grab a colony to add to your collection today. Remember, "One person cannot save them all, but we can all save just one!"

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Keeping and Spawning *Thysochromis ansorgii*

- Dr. Keith Arnold



Thysochromis ansorgii in the aquarium. Photo by Dave Hansen.

This article originally appeared in the Brazos Valley Aquarium Societies October 2010 Newsletter.

I'm not really infatuated with cichlids even though I have spawning colonies of two *Judidochromis* species and maintain several nice Angelfish in a 50-gallon aquarium.. Indeed, one certainly would not consider me to be a cichlidiot. But I cannot pass up a bargain, so when a bag of non-descript cichlids came up at the spring Houston Aquarium Society auction and the price remained low, I bid and won. Labeled *Thysochromis*, the bag contained four, plain-looking fish, each about 1½ inches in total length.

When I arrived home, I placed the four fish into a 10-gallon tank with an outside power filter and a couple of *Anubias nana* plants. Most of the tank had a bare bottom. Water was room temperature, about 72°F, and somewhat alkaline. I made 10 percent water changes every two or three weeks and fed the fish mostly on a high quality flake food. Under this regime, the fish grew rapidly and had reached 2 ½ - 3 inches in length.

In late May, I found one fish dead, floating at the top of the tank. Flash forward to late June. As I watched the tank, I noticed that two of the remaining fish kept the third in a corner, so I removed the odd fish out. At the same time, those plants became floaters!

Shortly after that, I saw only one fish, an obvious male from its fins and soft colors, at the front of the tank, while the second fish remained out of sight.



Photo by Dave Hansen,

On July 20th, I discovered both adults at the front of the tank, along with a small cloud of 25 or more half-inch fry. I have continued to feed all of this fish on a flake food diet, but have included a variety of cichlid growth food. As of this writing, most of the fry range from three-fourths to one inch in length. I recently moved about a dozen of the fry to a 5-gallon tank to ease crowding.



Thanks to Greg Steeves, I learned that the species is *Thysochromis ansorgii*, a modest-sized species from the coastal regions of southern Nigeria in West Africa. These pair-bonding fish are cave-spawners that report-

edly have a ravenous appetite for snails. Though not very colorful, the male does present a very pleasing appearance, with his flowing fins and soft colors. The female remains mostly a silver-colored fish, but with pleasant appearance. So, if you like flashy cichlids, this is not the fish for you. But if you like fish that exhibit strong parental care and which have a soft, pleasant appearance, then you might want to consider this species.



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Dr. Michael Kidd left and Dr. Keith Arnold right at the 2010 HCCC Fall Auction. Dr. Arnold was a recent speaker at our club and Dr. Kidd will be our special Christmas speaker this year.

A Spawning Report: *Cryptoheros* sp. “Honduran Red Point”

- Benjamin L. Smith



These fish were tucked away in a section of my favorite fish shop that I rarely pay much attention to. In fact, I probably wouldn't have noticed them at all if I wasn't paying keen attention to the pikes two tanks above them. From the bottom tank, I saw a flash of iridescent blue and, of course, thought it was going to be some Malawan cichlid. It was not. This fish is simply beautiful in person. I was not able to photograph it in a way that would serve it justice, nor was I able to find a picture on the internet that looked as beautiful as this fish did in person. That being said, it is basically a colorful Convict cichlid and so I think people in this hobby disregard it because we have so many other fish to chose from, other fish that are equally beautiful, more challenging to spawn, and at times even endangered or extinct in the wild.

I couldn't resist this fish for some reason and I'm glad I didn't. This fish, also known as the Blue Convict, can be collected from the Rio Mongo and Rio Danli. It prefers water with a low hardness, a pH of 7.2-8.0, and a temperature range from 73-82o F. They reach a maximum size of 5 inches with the males being larger than the females. The males are a beautiful iridescent blue with red highlights in their fins.

The females appear to have a more washed out (pale) version of the blue with less red in the fins, but with a rosy-red color in the belly. Juveniles start off striped in black and white.

Care and spawning for these fish is quite easy. I acquired my fish as young adults and placed them in a 10 gallon aquarium. My



water has a very high hardness, a pH of greater than 8.5 and I keep the temperature between 75-78o F. Water changes were every 3-4 wks and were about 50% of the volume.

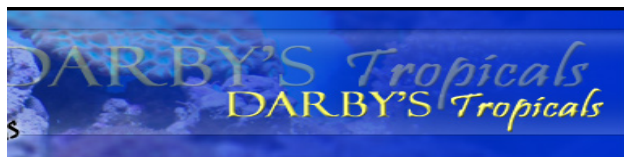
I had read that these fish would spawn inside of a week's time in their new home and on the 7th day, there were eggs on the inside of a plastic, hollow log. There appeared to be about 25 eggs and in a few days there were little wrigglers and then free swimming fry after one week. I only counted 18 free swimmers. The parents were fed flake and the fry were fed Hikari First Bites and then crushed flake.

One of my favorite things about spawning this fish was that the female, who stayed with the eggs, would move the free swimming fry from the log to a shallow pit for the day and then move them back to the log for the evening. She did this for 3 days and tried

desperately to keep them in the pit but after 3 days of it, she gave up and the fry were all over the tank. They spawned 2 more times, 3 weeks apart each time, and then the male beat up the female and so they had to be separated. I didn't have a larger tank for them so I nursed the female back to health and traded them. I have read that a 20 gallon should suffice, but I think the added length of a 30 L would be a better choice. I should mention that the subsequent spawns all disappeared (were eaten) once they were free swimming. One or two might live, but not all 25.

In all, I would recommend this fish to either novice or expert. It is beautiful, has interesting behavior, is easy to spawn, and doesn't require a lot of room. They are not as shy as some cichlids, but don't beg at the water's surface to be fed either. So, if you can find this fish, go ahead and give it a try.

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Harpagochromis sp. “golden duck”



Native to Lake Nawampassa, a Kyoga finger lake north of Lake Victoria, lives the beautiful piscivore *Harpagochromis* sp. “golden duck”. Dominant males will appear almost a solid black while females will display a copper-silver sheen. Maintenance in the aquarium is fairly unproblematic. A 200 liter or larger tank should be provided along with a protein rich diet and these fish will prosper nicely.

A maternal mouthbrooder, *Harpagochromis* sp. “golden duck” is capable of large spawn in excess of 70 eggs. Despite naturally subsisting on other fish, these cichlids are peaceful in the aquarium and easily bullied by more aggressive furu.

As yet undescribed, *Harpagochromis* sp. “golden duck” is still found in healthy population number within Lake Nawampassa. It is included in the C.A.R.E.S. listing, as are all cichlids endemic to the Kyoga Basin due to fragility of environment.

This is not one of the more colorful haplochromines and therefore not abundant in the cichlid hobby. Despite appearance, *Harpagochromis* sp. “golden duck” is a fish that requires our attention.



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Upcoming Events

Houston Aquarium Society
Sunday October 17th, 2010
Fall Live Fish Auction
11:00 am start - Check-in 10:00 am
American Legion Post
11702 Galveston Road
Houston, TX. 77034
(Where the jet is)

Texas Cichlid Association
Fall Auction
Hilton Garden Inn Irving, TX.
Usual TCA auction rules apply

Hill Country Cichlid Club
Sunday November 7, 2010
Collecting Trip - San Marcos River
San Marcos, TX.
Meet at noon just below Saltgrass Steakhouse.

Brazos Valley Aquarium Society
Thursday November 11, 2010
Monthly Meeting
3502 Carter Creek Parkway, Bryan. TX.

Texas Cichlid Association
December 4, 2010
Christmas Party and Crazy Santa Gift Exchange
7:00pm Spring Creek Barbeque
1509 Airport Freeway
Bedford, TX.

Hill Country Cichlid Club
December 4, 2010
Annual members only Pot Luck Christmas Party
Dr. Michael Kidd Presenting on Lake Malawi
See Members section of HCCC website for more details.

Oklahoma Aquarium Association
 No Meeting details submitted however information on Oklahoma City, Stillwater and Tulsa
 Chapter meetings can be found here:
<http://www.theokaa.org/vb40/showthread.php?7291-2010-Meeting-Schedule>



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