



# Predation by a Cuban Treefrog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) and a Domestic Cat (*Felis catus*) on Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) in Central Cuba, with a Review of Predators and Vertebrate Prey of Tropical House Geckos

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In the Cuban Archipelago, the Cuban Treefrog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*, Hylidae) is widely distributed on the main island and on at least 15 offshore islands, where it is relatively abundant (Estrada 2012; Rivalta González et al. 2014). The Cuban Treefrog is native to Cuba, the Cayman Islands, and at least eight Bahamian islands (Henderson and Powell 2009). It also has been introduced widely to many Caribbean Islands, Costa Rica, and the U.S. states of Florida, Georgia, and Hawaii (Owen et al. 2005; Henderson and Powell 2009; Powell et al. 2011, 2013). However, studies of this species focus largely on introduced rather than native populations (e.g., Meshaka 1996, 2001; Owen 2005; Smith 2005; Vargas Salinas 2006).

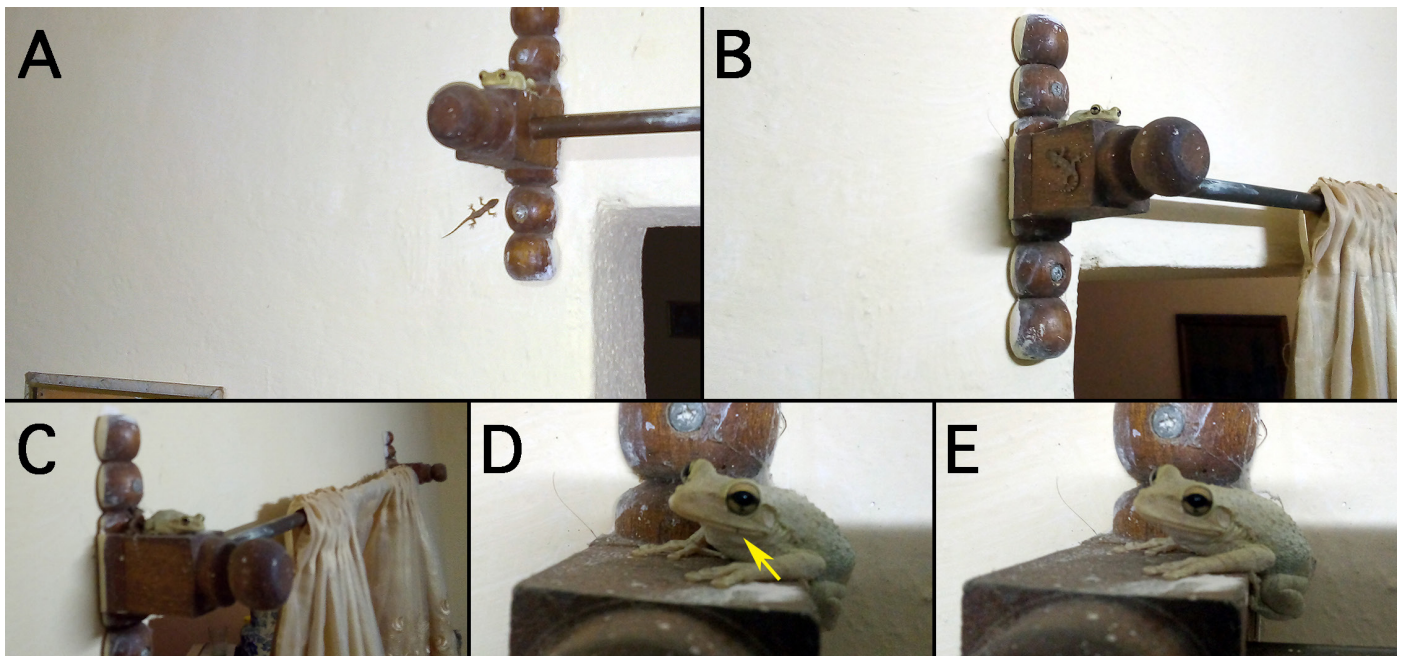
In Cuba, the Cuban Treefrog occupies both natural and anthropogenic habitats, in villages, rural, and urban areas, and often functions as a human commensal. It frequently is considered as a pest and can attain high indoor densities (e.g., personal observation of 4–6 individuals in a 2-m<sup>2</sup> bathroom). Cuban Treefrogs are voracious predators with a documented generalist diet that is highly plastic, consisting primarily of invertebrates, but small vertebrates such as frogs, lizards, and snakes are not uncommon (Meshaka 1996, 2001, 2011; Owen 2005; Glorioso et al. 2012) and cannibalism has been reported (Meshaka 2001; Kaiser et al. 2016; Borroto-Páez and Reyes 2019b).

Seven species of geckos have been introduced to Cuba, four of which are house geckos in the genus *Hemidactylus*. The Tropical House Gecko (*H. mabouia*) is the most abundant and widely distributed species in both urban and rural areas. It also functions as a human commensal (Borroto-Páez et al. 2015); sharing with the Cuban Treefrog walls, lights,

and perches; however, few competitive interactions between the two species have been described. Herein we report predation on a Tropical House Gecko by a Cuban Treefrog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) and a domestic cat (*Felis catus*).

In August 2019, we stayed in a 140-m<sup>2</sup> fourth-floor apartment in Corralillo (22°58'48"N, 80°36'05"W) in northern Villa Clara Province, Cuba. During our stay, we observed and counted at least five Cuban Treefrogs and eight Tropical House Geckos (three of them juveniles) in the apartment. During the night, an indoor light attracted nocturnal insects, principally lepidopterans. On several occasions, we observed both Cuban Treefrogs and Tropical House Geckos foraging for insects in the living room. Aware of the potential for competitive interactions, we kept cameras handy. At 1900 h on 22 August, we detected a Cuban Treefrog (SVL 52 mm) perched on a curtain support. At 2100 h, a young Tropical House Gecko (SVL 45 mm) emerged from behind a picture frame (Fig. 1A). The gecko approached the frog (Figs. 1B–C), apparently without detecting a possible predator or lacking the experience to avoid the threat. When the gecko touched the frog, it immediately turned and captured and swallowed the gecko. This happened so quickly that we captured this event with only the tip of the gecko's tail protruding from the frog's mouth (Fig. 1D). A moment later, ingestion was complete (Fig. 1E).

Previous records of *Osteopilus septentrionalis* preying on *Hemidactylus mabouia* (Meshaka 2004, 2011; Kingsland 2007; Voirin 2016) all occurred in Florida. To the best of our knowledge, no comparable predator-prey events have been reported in the native range of the Cuban Treefrog. However, because the two principals are both human commensals and



**Fig. 1.** A Cuban Treefrog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) preying on a young Tropical House Gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*). (A) The gecko approaches the curtain support after leaving its refuge under the picture frame in the lower left corner. (B) The gecko climbs onto the curtain support and (C) contacts the Cuban Treefrog, triggering the predation event. (D) An instant later, the Cuban Treefrog has ingested the gecko, with only the tip of its tail protruding from of the frog's mouth (arrow). (E) Ingestion is complete. Photographs by Rafael Borroto-Páez.

**Table 1.** A list of predators of Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus mabouia*), updating lists in Nogueira et al. (2013) and Pedroso-Santos et al. (2019). Additions are marked with an asterisk (\*).

Predator	Location	Reference(s)
<b>Arthropoda</b> (Insecta, Arachnida, Myriapoda)		
Eciton Army Ants ( <i>Eciton burchellii</i> ) (Formicidae)	Brazil	Sazima (2015b)*
Unidentified ctenid spider (Ctenidae)	Brazil	Lanschi and Ferreira (2012)
Unidentified lycosid spider (Lycosidae)	Brazil	Koski et al. (2013)
Hermit Spider ( <i>Nephilengys cruentata</i> ) (Nephilidae)	Brazil	Diniz (2011)
Brick-red Pink-toed Spider ( <i>Avicularia variegata</i> ) (Theraphosidae)	Brazil	Queiroz-Almedia et al. (2019)*
Amazonian Scorpion ( <i>Tityus metuendus</i> ) (Buthidae)	Brazil	Albuquerque (2012)*
Unidentified camel spider (Solifugae)	Africa	Loveridge (1947)*
Unidentified myriapod (centipede?)	Brazil	Pessoa (2017)*
<b>Chordata: Vertebrata</b> (Amphibia)		
Granulated Toad ( <i>Rhinella major</i> ) (Bufonidae)	Brazil	Pedroso-Santos et al. (2019)
Venezuelan Snouted Treefrog ( <i>Scinax x-signatus</i> ) (Hylidae)	Brazil	Zachi-Silva and Borges-Nojosa (2017)
Cuban Treefrog ( <i>Osteopilus septentrionalis</i> ) (Hylidae)	Cuba	This paper*
	Florida	Meshaka et al. (2004)*; Meshaka (2011)*; Kingsland (2007)*; Voirin (2016)*

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Predator	Location	Reference(s)
<b>Chordata: Vertebrata (Reptilia)</b>		
Antigua Bank Tree Anole ( <i>Anolis leachii</i> ) (Dactyloidae)	Barbuda	Trageser et al. (2018)
Cuban Giant Anole ( <i>Anolis equestris</i> ) (Dactyloidae)	Florida	Nicholson and Richards (1999)*; Thawley et al. (2017)*
Puerto Rican Crested Anole ( <i>Anolis cristatellus</i> ) (Dactyloidae)	Tortola (BVI)	Owen and Perry (2005)*
	Florida	Mathes (2020)*
Cuban Brown Anole ( <i>Anolis sagrei</i> ) (Dactyloidae)	Florida	Benoit et al. (2019)*
North American Green Anole ( <i>Anolis carolinensis</i> ) (Dactyloidae)	Florida	Stroud and Sanger (2020)*
Tropical House Gecko ( <i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i> ) (Gekkonidae)	Brazil, Tanzania	Zamprogno and Teixeira (1998); Bonfiglio et al (2006)*; Pombal and Pombal-Jr. (2010); Albuquerque et al. (2013)*; Costa-Campos and Furtado (2013); Lyakurwa (2017)
Tokay Gecko ( <i>Gekko gekko</i> ) (Gekkonidae)	Florida	Meshaka et al. (2004)*
Camaleãozinho ( <i>Enyalius perditus</i> ) (Leiosauridae)	Brazil	Muscat et al. (2016)
Brazilian skink ( <i>Brasiliscincus agilis</i> ) (Mabuyidae)	Brazil	Vrcibradic and Rocha (2002)
Brazilian whiptail ( <i>Glaucomastix littoralis</i> ) (Teiidae)	Brazil	Rocha et al. (2000), Menezes et al. (2006)
Amazon Lava Lizard ( <i>Tropidurus torquatus</i> ) (Tropiduridae)	Brazil	Araújo (1991); Rocha and Vrcibradic (1998); Teixeira and Giovanelli (1999); Galdino and Van Sluys (2004)
Neotropical Lava Lizard ( <i>Tropidurus hispidus</i> ) (Tropiduridae)	Brazil	Barbosa Da Silva et al. (2012)*; Souza Pagel et al. (2020)*
Nile Monitor ( <i>Varanus niloticus</i> ) (Varanidae)	Africa	Loveridge (1947)*
	Florida	Mazzoti et al. (2020)*
Turks & Caicos Boa ( <i>Chilabothrus chrysogaster chrysogaster</i> ) (Boidae)	Caicos Bank	Reynolds et al. (2017)
Linnaeus's Sipo ( <i>Chironius exoletus</i> ) (Colubridae)	Brazil	Rodrigues (2007)
Two-headed Sipo ( <i>Chironius bicarinatus</i> ) (Colubridae)	Brazil	Vrcibradic and Eisfeld (2016)
Boettger's Sipo ( <i>Chironius flavolineatus</i> ) (Colubridae)	Brazil	Marques et al. (2016)*
Giant Parrot Snake ( <i>Leptophis abaetulla</i> ) (Colubridae)	Brazil	Albuquerque et al. (2007); Germano and França (2017)
Cope's Parrot Snake ( <i>Leptophis depressirostris</i> ) (Colubridae)	Brazil	Thomas (1976)
Green Vinesnake ( <i>Oxybelis fulgidus</i> ) (Colubridae)	Brazil	Santos-Jr. et al. (2011)
Brown Vinesnake ( <i>Oxybelis aeneus</i> ) (Colubridae)	Brazil	Franzini et al. (2018)
Emerald Snake ( <i>Hapsidophrys smaragdinus</i> ) (Colubridae)	Gabon	Pauwels et al. (2017)*
Variegated Greensnake ( <i>Philothamnus semivariatus</i> ) (Colubridae)	Africa	Loveridge (1947)*
White-lipped Heraldsnake ( <i>Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia</i> ) (Colubridae)	Africa	Loveridge (1947)*
Puerto Rican Racer ( <i>Borikenophis portoricensis</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Peter Island (BVI)	Grant (1932)
	Puerto Rico	Estrada and Borroto-Páez (2020)*
Mona Racer ( <i>Borikenophis variegatus</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Mona Island	M. Leal in Henderson and Sajdak (1996)
Amaral's Groundsnake ( <i>Caeteboia amarali</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Passos et al. (2012)
Velvet Swampsnake ( <i>Erythrolamprus typhlus</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Da Silva et al. (2010)

(continued)

Predator	Location	Reference(s)
Banded Cat-eyed Snake ( <i>Leptodeira annulata</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Cantor and Pizzatto (2008); Hudson et al. (2019)*
Fronted Groundsnake ( <i>Lygophis flavifrenatus</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	De Lema et al. (1983); Michaud and Dixon (1989)
Duméril's False Coralsnake ( <i>Oxyrhopus clathratus</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Morato (2005)
Guibe's Flamesnake ( <i>Oxyrhopus guibeï</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Gavira et al. (2015)*; Gaiarsa et al. (2013)*
Forest Flamesnake ( <i>Oxyrhopus petolarius</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Nogueiras et al. (2013)
Amazon False Coralsnake ( <i>Oxyrhopus rhombifer</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Maschio et al. (2004)*; Assis et al. (2020)*
Brazilian False Coralsnake ( <i>Oxyrhopus trigeminus</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Alencar et al. (2012)
Paraguayan Green Racer ( <i>Philodryas nattereri</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	De Mesquita et al. (2011); Godinho et al. (2012)*
Lichtenstein's Green Racer ( <i>Philodryas olfersii</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Thomas (1976)
Patagonian Green Racer ( <i>Philodryas patagoniensis</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Barbo et al. (2011)
Common Green Racer ( <i>Philodryas viridissima</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Jorge and Simoes (2018)*
Panamanian Spotted Nightsnake ( <i>Siphlophis cervinus</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Martin and Oliveira (1998)*
Guanabara Spotted Nightsnake ( <i>Siphlophis pulcher</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Sazima and Argôlo (1994)
Worontzow's Spotted Nightsnake ( <i>Siphlophis worontzowi</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Bernarde and Abe (2010)
Amazon Coastal House Snake ( <i>Thamnodynastes pallidus</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Rocha and Vrcibradic (1998)
Coastal House Snake ( <i>Thamnodynastes strigatus</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	Bernarde et al. (2000)
Serra Snake ( <i>Tropidodryas serra</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	De Oliveiras (2008)
Jiboinha ( <i>Tropidodryas striaticeps</i> ) (Dipsadidae)	Brazil	De Oliveiras (2008)
Striped House Snake ( <i>Boaedon lineatus</i> ) (Lamprophiidae)	Africa	Loveridge (1947)*
East African Shovel-snouted Snake ( <i>Prosymna ambigua</i> ) (Prosymnidae)	Africa	Loveridge (1953, 1958)*; Pitman (1974)*
Two-striped Sandsnake ( <i>Psammophis biseriatus</i> ) (Psammophiidae)	Kenya	Cottone and Bauer (2008)*
Spotted Brown Trope ( <i>Tropidophis pardalis</i> ) (Tropidophiidae)	Cuba	Armas and Iturreaga (2017)*
Southern Coralsnake ( <i>Micrurus frontalis</i> ) (Elapidae)	Brazil	De Lema et al. (1983)
Alcatrazes Lancehead ( <i>Bothrops alcatraz</i> ) (Viperidae)	Brazil	Marques et al. (2002)
Golden Lancehead ( <i>Bothrops insularis</i> ) (Viperidae)	Brazil	Duarte et al. (1995)
Jaracara ( <i>Bothrops jararaca</i> ) (Viperidae)	Brazil	Sazima (1992); Barbo (2008); Barbo et al. (2011)
<b>Chordata: Vertebrata (Aves)</b>		
Roadside Hawk ( <i>Rupornis magnirostris</i> ) (Accipitridae)	Brazil	De Macêdo and Freire (2010)
Smooth-billed Ani ( <i>Crotophaga ani</i> ) (Cuculidae)	Brazil	Figueiredo-de-Andrade and Silveira (2012)
Guira Cuckoo ( <i>Guira guira</i> ) (Cuculidae)	Brazil	Aurora (2011)*; Crivellari (2014)*; Fenalti (2014)*; Andrade et al. (2015); Branco (2018)*; Rodrigues et al. (2019)*
Straight-billed Woodcreeper ( <i>Dendroplex picus</i> ) (Dendrocolaptidae)	Brazil	Vieira (2019)*
Common Kestrel ( <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> ) (Falconidae)	Africa	Loveridge (1947)*
Black-billed Scythebill ( <i>Campylorhamphus falcularius</i> ) (Furnariidae)	Brazil	Vecchi and Harding (2016)*

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Predator	Location	Reference(s)
Pearly-eyed Thrasher ( <i>Margarops fuscatus</i> ) (Mimidae)	Guana (BVI)	J. Lazell in Henderson and Powell (2009)*
White-banded Mockingbird ( <i>Mimus triurus</i> ) (Mimidae)	Argentina	Montero (2018)*
Burrowing Owl ( <i>Athene cunicularia</i> ) (Strigidae)	Brazil, Ecuador	Silva-Porto and Cerqueira (1990)*; Motta Junior (1996)*; Vieira and Teixeira (2008)*; Rodríguez Reyes (2015)*
Pale-breasted Thrush ( <i>Turdus leucomelas</i> ) (Turdidae)	Brazil	Sazima and D'Angelo (2011)*
Great Kiskadee ( <i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i> ) (Tyrannidae)	Brazil	Gruber (2011)*; Pereira and Melo (2012)*; Sazima (2015a)*; Dvojak (2017)*
<b>Chordata: Vertebrata</b> (Mammalia)		
Black-pencilled Marmoset ( <i>Callithrix penicillata</i> ) (Callitrichidae)	Brazil	Rocha-Santos et al. (2013)
Silvery Marmoset ( <i>Mico argentatus</i> ) (Callitrichidae)	Brazil	Mourthe and Varga Lopes (2019)*
Domestic Cat ( <i>Felis catus</i> ) (Felidae)	Mozambique	Peck et al. (2008)*
	Cuba	This paper*
Heart-nosed Bat ( <i>Cardioderma cor</i> ) (Megadermatidae)	Kenya	Wojnowski and Selempo (2005)*
Fringe-lipped Bat ( <i>Trachops cirrhosis</i> ) (Phyllostomidae)	Brazil	Leal et al. (2018)*

frequently coexist, predation events like that described above must be more frequent than reports would indicate.

When we asked the residents of the other five apartments in the building, all but one described situations similar to what we encountered. Only one ground-floor apartment was free of geckos, almost certainly because a cat (*Felis catus*) lived in that apartment. The resident described several occasions when the cat had hunted and eaten geckos in the apartment. The apparent absence of Tropical House Geckos suggests that a single cat can control a gecko population better than several Cuban Treefrogs.

Reports of predation on Tropical House Geckos usually are based on fortuitous observations of ephemeral nocturnal events. In Table 1, we update the list of predators provided previously by Nogueira et al. (2013) and Pedrosa-Santos et al. (2019). We compiled new additions to those lists using internet searches in Google Scholar for keywords including “predation,” “prey,” “gekkonid lizards,” “tropical house gecko,” “*Hemidactylus*,” “*mabouia*,” and various combinations with names of previously recorded predators. Because natural history notes in *Herpetological Review* frequently record predation events, we searched for the keyword “mabouia” in all issues. In some instances, predators were listed without citing any evidence; those were omitted. Nevertheless, we added 39 new predators and 66 new events. The most frequent predators were vertebrates (73), mostly species of snakes (41), followed by lizards (13), birds (11), mammals (5), and frogs (3). Only eight records documented invertebrate predation. By far the most records and predator species were from Brazil (57), whereas, for example, only nine species and ten observations occurred on islands in the Greater Caribbean. More reports

documented predation by native predators (77 species and 104 reports) than by introduced predators (9 and 17), which suggests that Tropical House Geckos could play an important role as prey to at least some native species. However, whether those predator interactions are beneficial or harmful to native ecosystems will require additional research, especially since little is known about the risks posed by exotic diseases and parasites dispersed by invasive species (e.g., Kraus 2009; Barnett et al. 2018).

Many undocumented reports record predation by Tropical House Geckos on insects, arachnids, and other invertebrates (most frequently nocturnal lepidopterans, cockroaches, crickets, myriapods, isopods, etc.), but most lack documentation of species and only a few provide actual evidence. Except for the six cases of cannibalism in *H. mabouia* (Table 1), only eight reports (6 of them from islands in the Greater Caribbean) document predation on small vertebrates (Table 2).

The role of Tropical House Geckos as prey (81 recorded predators; Table 1) contrasts sharply with their role as predator (8 recorded examples of vertebrate prey; Table 2). However, this apparent imbalance is largely attributable to the many records of unidentified invertebrates consumed by Tropical House Gecko (and not considered herein), despite the reality that invertebrates comprise nearly 99% of all animal diversity (Ponder and Lunney 1999).

These updated lists of Tropical House Geckos as predators and prey may be useful for guiding future studies on the feeding ecology of this widely introduced gecko with native species. Furthermore, although reports are sparse, the abundance and densities of introduced geckos suggest that they likely engage in many other interactions with native species.

**Table 2.** List of vertebrate prey taken by Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus mabouia*).

Prey	Location	Reference(s)
Unidentified frog ( <i>Eleutherodactylus</i> sp.)	Puerto Rico	Rivero (1978)
White-headed Dwarf Gecko ( <i>Lygodactylus mombasicus</i> )	Africa	Loveridge (1947)
Unidentified gecko ( <i>Sphaerodactylus</i> sp.)	Puerto Rico	Rivero (1978)
Venezuelan Coastal Clawed Gecko ( <i>Gonatodes antillensis</i> )	Curaçao	Dornburg et al. (2011), Lamb et al. (2020)
Dutch Leaf-toed Gecko ( <i>Phyllodactylus martini</i> )	Curaçao	Dornburg et al. (2011), Lamb et al. (2020)
Unidentified anole ( <i>Anolis</i> sp.)	Puerto Rico	Rivero (1978)
Unidentified anole hatchling ( <i>Anolis</i> sp.)	Florida	CISEH (2018)
Brahminy Blindsnake ( <i>Indotyphlops braminus</i> )	Curaçao	Lamb et al. (2020)

For example, competitive interactions of Tropical House Geckos with native Caribbean lizards have been described by Powell and Henderson (1992), Powell (2003), Stroud (2013), and Borroto-Páez and Reyes (2019a). A better understanding of the various roles filled by these invasive geckos is necessary for the development of management plans for their mitigation and control.

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