



## John Clarke's Obituary - by AMG Darby



© Kate Aubury

John leading a walk in Kemerton Wood, November 2007

**KCT's Conservation Advisor John Clarke sadly passed away on 16th December 2019, after a long period of serious illness. Here, Chairman Adrian Darby pays tribute to a man who loved nature and worked tirelessly for conservation.**

I first met John Clarke in 1982 when he and his wife Pamela came to Kemerton to act as unpaid wardens on my farm. Despite the fact that he had no formal training in nature conservation or biology he was a very effective self-taught naturalist and was a superb finder of nests. He and Pamela threw themselves into the task of identifying all the plants and animals to be found at Kemerton, and in this they received enormous support from many local naturalists. He engaged in a number of projects to improve the farm for wildlife and identified the high water table which showed the possibility of creating the Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve.

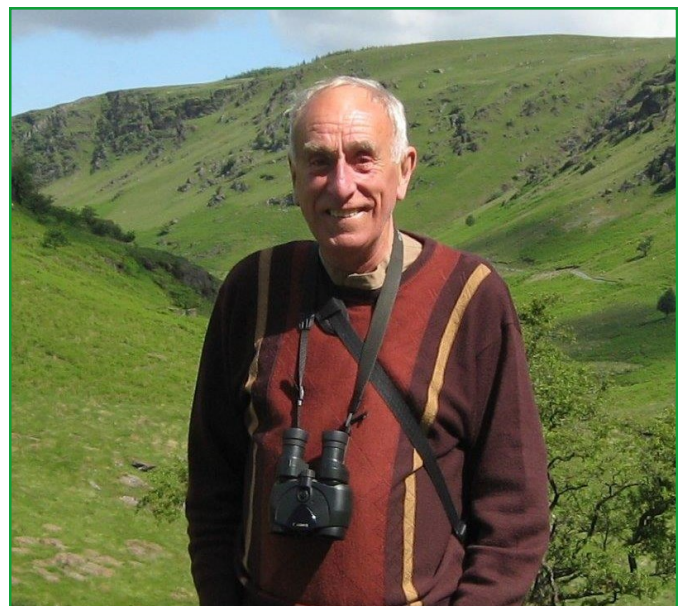
The Clarkes stayed at Kemerton for four years and then moved up to Colonsay in the Inner Hebrides where they had bought a cottage. However, they came back to Kemerton each year for an annual visit which enabled them to keep an eye on the emerging Kemerton Lake. They finally decided to come back permanently in 1994. They worked part time for Kemerton Conservation Trust which had been founded while they were away. During the remainder of

his time John acted as a conservation advisor to Overbury Estate and was known locally for his conservation work and citizen science projects.

Sadly he became ill in 1996 and for the rest of his life suffered from a series of debilitating conditions which left him increasingly incapacitated. Despite this, he was always full of ideas, and as he lost the ability to carry out physical tasks himself he became increasingly effective in persuading others. He was very successful in getting local landowners and farmers to co-operate as was shown by the success of the Carrant Catchment Area Restoration Project, which continues to grow.

At the end of his life, although he was weak and in pain, he was still working. Last summer he derived pleasure from going round Kemerton Lake on a motorised buggy and being driven around Overbury Estate to look at the dense population of nesting skylarks on Bredon Hill.

A huge number of family and friends packed St Nicholas Church in Kemerton to bid farewell to John at a memorial service in January, but his lasting legacy is all around us in the reserves he helped create and the nature he protected so passionately. We shall miss him hugely.



# South Midlands Orchids Under the Spotlight



© Kate Aubury

Dr Colin Scrutton giving his talk,  
Victoria Hall, September 2019

On September 24th our Members were treated to a wonderful talk on 'Orchids of the South Midlands' by Friend of KCT and orchid expert Dr Colin Scrutton.

Colin, who is Chairman of the Hardy Orchid Society, and his wife Angela, who is Secretary of the same organization, travel extensively to find and photograph hardy orchids in their natural habitat both here in the UK and further afield in Europe, and Colin is

an expert on many of the species that grow on KCT reserves, particularly at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve.

The talk was a fascinating, in-depth look at this stunning group of plants, with Colin's scientific and academic background in evidence through his meticulous recording and photographing of each species.

The talk covered every species of orchid which grows in the South Midlands, including all those found at Kemerton, and Colin helpfully noted nearby public sites for those that cannot be seen on our reserves. More than one attendee left with a plan to search out and photograph some of them in 2020, inspired by Colin's wonderful images.

For those who have yet to come on an orchid walk at Kemerton

Lake to see such beauties as Common Spotted, Southern Marsh, Bee and Pyramidal Orchid, as well as various hybrids, we have a guided walk on Sunday 14th June, starting at 2.30pm which is free for members and £2 for non-members (more details on our website).

Our thanks to Colin for sharing his passion and expertise with us all, it was a brilliant evening.



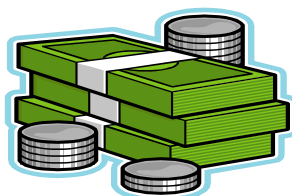
© Alan Marsh

Early Purple Orchard *Orchis mascula*,  
Kemerton Wood, May 2010

## Funding Update

In the second half of 2019 we applied for a number of grants, some of which we are still waiting to hear about. One grant, for a multi-year, in-depth invertebrate survey on Bredon Hill in partnership with Natural England was sadly rejected, but our application to Natural Networks was successful (more details on page 4) and work has already started on this habitat project.

We are currently focusing on raising funds for much-needed volunteer tools and for a replacement boat to allow



us to carry out vital habitat management works in the deep water and on the islands at Kemerton Lake, as our current boat is reaching the end of its life.

In September we received our annual dividend from local oil buying club SeSaME. We receive a dividend of £0.5ppl from Kemerton members and for 2018/19 year the dividend was £21.25. If you buy oil and want to know more, visit their website [www.sesame.me.uk](http://www.sesame.me.uk).

Long-term local supporter Bredon Forest School donated another £1200 to the Trust in the second half of 2019. These are unrestricted funds which are used to help with general costs including volunteer tools, materials for repairs etc. £500 of it was used to replace our brushcutter in the autumn. We are very grateful for their generous support.

We also received another £500 donation in September from Miss K.M Harbinson's Charitable Trust, also unrestricted funds, and we are very grateful for their continued support too.

**Thank you to all who have supported us so far this year!**



# KCT Governors' Annual Board Meeting 2019

At least once a year KCT Governors meet for a Board Meeting to review the past year's work and set goals for the new year. In addition to the governors the meeting is also attended by John Clarke and Kate Aubury, who both report on their activities for the year. This time John Clarke was sadly too ill to attend but his wife Pamela, who has taken over the Conservation Advisor role attended in his place.

Our work in 2019 was again affected by John Clarke's continued illness, with more of the workload moving to Support Coordinator Kate Aubury, however we still had plenty to report on. We have completed a significant number of grant applications, many of which we are still waiting to hear about, with a focus on projects which fit within our new 'Kemerton Connections' umbrella project,

which aims to consider wider landscape connectivity in all we do.

Out on the reserves we put in new vehicle access bridges in Kemerton Wood (see news in brief) and completed the Kemerton Wood Wildflower Project (see page 4). Further afield our partnership work with Kemerton Estate and CCARP has continued. The issue of vandalism at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve has been an ongoing problem in 2019, and potential ways to deal with it formed part of the discussions.

After reviewing the past year, the governors identified their priorities for 2020; raising funds for part-time staff, continuing work with CCARP, delivering any projects which are successful in gaining funding, and focussing on citizen science projects on Grass Snake, Yellow Wagtail and Little Owl (see page 6 for more information).



Governors on a fungi foray, Cowshed Woods, October 2019

The day before the meeting, the governors enjoyed a fungi foray through The Far Park and Cowshed Wood, which are both part-managed by the Trust under an agreement with the landowner, led by Kate Aubury, our in-house fungus recorder and Governor Peter Marren.

The 2018/19 Chairman's Report, Annual Accounts, Conservation Officer's Report and Support Coordinator's Report are all available to read on our website now in the 'News & Events' section.

## News in Brief

In September 2019 10 large concrete drainage pipes were delivered to Kemerton Wood on the back of a lorry, and within less than a day, they were used to create 5 bridges where existing woodland rides intersected with a stream. The new bridges are safe for vehicles and replace rotten footbridges, allowing better access for management including the regular mowing our warden has to do so they are a great addition and, with an estimated lifespan of 100+ years, a job worth doing. Kemerton Estate paid for 50% of the cost as their vehicles will also use the new access on occasion.



A newly created drainage pipe bridge, Kemerton Wood, September 2019

In late November, some lucky visitors to Water's Edge Hide saw two otters in the lake, fishing and playing. Although we know otters occasionally visit the lake, this was the first time they had been seen in broad daylight and photos taken. Sadly they did not stick around

and have not been seen since, so they were probably just exploring the area.

Frustratingly the last couple of months has seen the East Hide targeted as a hangout spot for drinking and using drugs and after every visit the unknown troublemakers have left the hide in a state. The police are aware and assisting us but the open nature of the site makes stopping such things very difficult. It is with sadness that we have therefore taken the decision to put a combination lock on the East Hide. We will inform members of the code and it will also be available on request for frequent visitors.

## Natural Networks Funding Secured for Major New Project

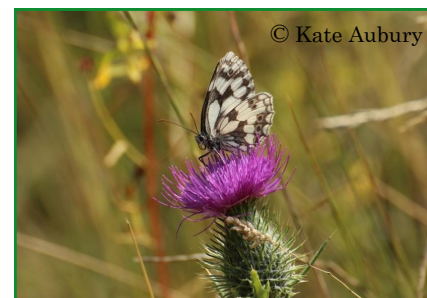


KCT is delighted to announce it has successfully bid for £2417.74 funding from the England European Regional Development Fund through the Natural Networks programme delivered in partnership by Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. The funding will contribute to an important programme of habitat restoration and creation at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. Work on the project began in December 2019 and will be completed by March 2021.

Kemerton Lake, which has a mosaic of habitats in addition to the lake itself, is well known for its wetland birds, dragonflies, butterflies including Common Blue and Marbled White and grassland flora including native orchids such as Pyramidal Orchid. However, in recent years the grassland and reedbeds have become increasing scrubbed up with bramble and self-seeding willow and alder saplings,

despite sterling work by our volunteer warden and work party volunteers. Although scrub is an important woodland edge habitat, if left unmanaged it will soon overtake the species-rich grassland and turn the reedbeds into wet woodland, reducing the value of these key habitats.

Funding from the Natural Networks programme, in conjunction with KCT's own funds, will allow the Trust to use local contractors CRC Ecology, who are specialists in wetland habitat restoration, to undertake a largescale programme of scrub clearance including sapling removal from reedbed margins and bramble and sapling removal from limestone grassland. The project will also create new habitat for wildlife with the installation of bird and bat boxes along the woodland edge and the creation of a bee bank and reptile hibernaculum in the grassland area. Our volunteers will also be involved throughout the project; Support Coordinator Kate



Marbled White, *Melanargia galathea*, KLRN, July 2018

Aubury will be managing it, and our Warden John Threadingham will assist with habitat works onsite, supported by our enthusiastic work party volunteers.

By restoring the reedbeds and grassland, the project will benefit a range of wildlife including the nationally scarce Dingy Skipper, which is found on the grassland, and birds such as Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting which nest in the reedbeds.

As part of the project, the Trust has written a new management plan for the reserve to ensure the improvements made are sustained in the future.

## Final Report on Kemerton Wood Wildflower Project

In spring 2019 KCT secured funding for a small project in Kemerton Wood which built on earlier work to continue increasing the ground flora in our relatively young woodland.

Thanks to generous funding from Friends of KCT Miles and Joan Kulukundis, we bought 500 native Wild Daffodil bulbs and 120,000 native English Bluebell seeds. We have planted bluebell bulbs in the past but due to expense the area covered remains small, so the



The gang planting bluebell seeds, Kemerton Wood, October 2019

project is partly an experiment to see if seeds are more cost-effective to cover larger areas, although we have to wait a few

years to find out, as seeds take longer to mature.

Our wonderful volunteers planted bulbs in September and sowed seeds in October. The weather in October was very wet but our hardy bunch completed the job despite being soaked to the skin!

A project report is available on our website in the 'News & Events' section. Our grateful thanks to Miles and Joan for supporting this project.



# A Keen Eye: news from the hides

## - by David Keen, Friend of KCT

© David Keen



Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*, KLNK, January 2020

Up until mid-November the lake was very quiet apart from a few ducks but with so much rain and flooding the wildfowl had no shortage of places to go. This season the kingfishers have been seen frequently due to the rivers being in flood several times; they must find it difficult to catch fish in the murky water but the lake is clear and it's a great opportunity for photographers.

On November 13th I went to try and get some shots of kingfishers. This was the best day that we had had for a couple of weeks, it was dry and the light was good. I set up my camera and sat quietly waiting then I heard a tapping sound coming from outside the hide so I went out to see what it was and a kingfisher was on the hide roof no more than 6ft from me dispatching a fish he had caught and not a bit bothered by me! (I have noticed that one of the kingfishers has a ring on).

My next visit to Kemerton Lake was on December 12th

and there had been quite a build up of waterfowl, mostly widgeon, well over 100 birds, as well as Canada geese and the odd tufted ducks.

There have been a few highs and lows in 2019. The sighting of a pair of otters must be one of the highs but it may also be one of the lows as they may be suspects in the disappearance of lots of young water birds this year but regardless they are fascinating to watch and my favourite mammal. Last year I was watching one at Tewkesbury Mill swimming up and down in the Mill Avon as a fishing contest was going on; the winner that week weighed in with 45lb of fish, about 43lb more than the otter, so no real harm to the fish stock, but lets hope they move on before the birds start nesting (Ed: they have not been seen on site again).

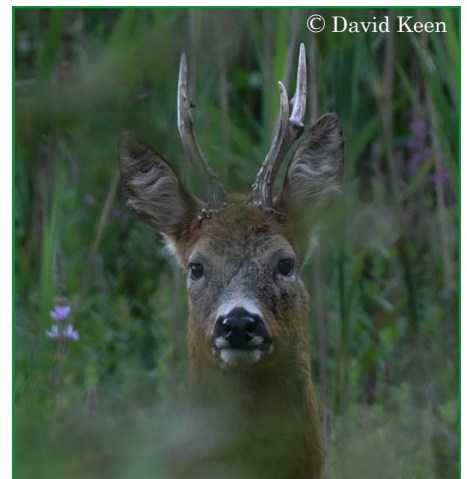
For me the highlight of 2019 was the barn owl that I saw in June and July - it was a most welcome sight. There are still signs of the owls as owl pellets have been found by the stile and on the boardwalk.

When I look back through my library of photos and look at the date the image was taken it gives me some idea of what was about at this time last year and what I should be looking out for. It does not always work out as I had not seen a fallow deer on the site since October 2018 and it was not until January the 6th 2020 as I was getting my camera out of the car I spotted a fallow doe standing about 25 yards from me but she did not stay to

have her photo taken, I did however manage to get two nice photos of a roe buck and doe standing in one of the tracks. The deer population seem to have declined a bit since I first started visiting the reserve or it could be that I have not put as much time in over the last 3 months, but this is a new year and things will start to happen. The first to arrive last year was the oystercatcher on January 29th so it will be interesting to see if they are first this year, it is now January 15th and I visited the lake this morning, there must be 200-300 widgeon now and a few tufted duck, there was also a pair of gadwall, the little grebe which stay with us all year round, and of course lots of coots that never seem to stop fighting with each other! No deer today just a fox doing its round, this is the time of the year that they go looking for a mate, they are not very welcome by pheasant rearers and gamekeepers but when you see one in its prime they are stunning.

We must wait now and see what the coming months bring.

© David Keen



Male Roe Deer, *Capreolus capreolus*, Kemerton Wood, January 2020

## Calling All Citizen Scientists! A final plea from John Clarke



Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica* on corrugated iron, Kemerton Wood

*This article was written by John Clarke prior to his death in December. His wife Pamela will be continuing this work.*

A few years ago I asked local people for help with my study of Spotted Flycatcher. This adorable little migrant breeds in the Bredon Hill villages. The response was fantastic and scientists used the name "Citizen Scientist" to describe the volunteers. In 2020 I am looking for Citizen Scientists to help in my latest project - the plan is to spend at least part of the year looking for three target species:

Grass snake is seen regularly around this area but exactly where and how often? They hibernate so won't be about until Spring. Our database has historical records but it

would be good to get more. One way would be if people provide artificial shelters or refuges as this snake will bask on a sheet of corrugated iron or indeed underneath it. A network of sites like this would help boost the number of casual records we receive.

Yellow Wagtail is now in serious decline. This beautiful wagtail is the only migrant member of the family. It nests on the ground and in recent years is found typically in rape, bean and root crops. We once located a nest in a corn-field adjacent to a road – the branches of several large oaks hung over the road. It was the time of year when Looper Moth caterpillars emerge in their thousands and, having gorged on oak leaves, lower themselves to the ground on gossamer threads before setting off in their distinctive style to find somewhere to hibernate. In this case they landed on the road where many were snapped up by the Yellow Wagtails and taken back to the nest to feed young.

Little Owl is our smallest, and probably most loved, owl

and calls during the day. However, it too is in decline - possibly associated with the decline in old orchards. Nest predation by Grey Squirrel and site competition with Jackdaw will also have played a part. Little Owl feeds on beetles, worms and small mammals and requires both rough and short-grazed grass-land. This probably explains their attraction to traditional orchards.

Volunteers, dog walkers, bird watchers and casual walkers will be asked to look out for Grass Snake and Yellow Wagtail throughout Spring and Summer and Little Owl throughout the year. If you do see any of these species please note where and when and email the information to Pamela Clarke

[pmclarke12@btinternet.com](mailto:pmclarke12@btinternet.com).



Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

## Kemerton Apple Day Celebrates Orchards

In early October Kemerton Orchard Workers held their annual Apple Day at Victoria Hall, Kemerton, and KCT were in attendance to support our sister organisation.

As always there were long queues for the apple pressing, with many locals bringing apples from their own garden, whilst everyone else could buy juice from apples picked in Daffurn's Orchard.



Kate & her daughter Lottie sampling some of the orchard produce!

This year, in addition to the usual stands manned by

KOW and KCT inside the hall, there was also a local wood worker, with some beautifully crafted items, and of course a delicious selection of handmade cakes available with tea or coffee, much appreciated by the hungry volunteers!

All funds raised at the event go towards maintaining Daffurn's Orchard for the community.



# News from the Carrant Catchment Area Restoration Project - by Joanne Leigh, FWAGSW

The group has made great progress over the 3 years that it has been in operating and our membership has now increased to 36 members spread across the Carrant and Isbourne Catchments; from Winchcombe to Bredon Hill. It was formed on the inspiration of John Clarke who was at the time diagnosed with a terminal illness. It is very sad that we have recently lost John but I hope that this group will carry on his legacy and continue to build habitat connections and increase wildlife on Bredon Hill and the surrounding area.

Indirectly, farming has been responsible for shaping our landscape over centuries, so it will be no surprise that it has the potential to be a carbon sink. Headline news seems to vilify the hand that feeds the nation but there are many things that farming can do to help with climate change by supporting sustainable food production. Our group is dedicated to improving habitat connectivity at a landscape scale; this includes improving soil health and water quality. These actions restore carbon and help embed it into the soil, keeping it there for millennia.

Some of the many things we have helped to complete over this winter are to plant and restore traditional orchards, plant new and restore native hedgerows and plant native trees in the local landscape. This mosaic of features helps to create wildlife corridors

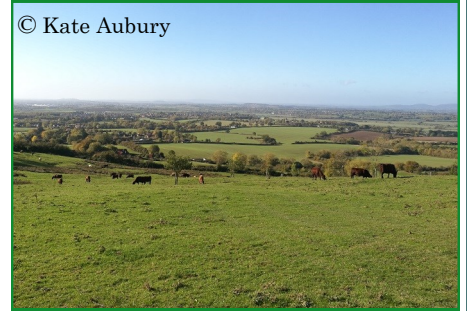
that allow safe travel, connect breeding areas and ensure continuous food supply.

We have recently started water quality monitoring for our members; checking the current state and suggesting areas that can be improved next to the watercourse. We are also helping Worcestershire County Council slow flows upstream by putting in leaky woody dams. This type of work helps to reduce impacts on pinch points lower down the catchment which is proving beneficial to settlements in these areas; it is also helping to reduce the siltation of water by creating gravel cleaning dams and silt traps. We hope to be doing more natural flood management north of Bredon Hill in 2020 and are seeking landowners who would like to be involved.

Meanwhile, in the Isbourne catchment we are seeing great results in Winchcombe following the construction of leaky dams at Charlton Abbots; we aim to put on a demonstration soon for anyone who would like to see this work created.

Water flows can also be slowed down by strategically planting hedges and trees along contours of the land that will take up excessive water and be obstructive to flows. However, the true hero in absorption and flow control is tussocky grass. This is one of the key roles land will play to combat climate change, not only for water infiltration but also carbon absorption. We are

© Kate Aubury



Red Poll Cattle grazing on Bredon Hill  
- mob grazing will help create better grassland and store more carbon

learning more and more about the abilities of deep rooting species to sequester carbon and improve soil structure that will allow farming to lead the way on quality land management for food production and carbon sequestration.

Many farmers already practise zero till arable management, but livestock farming can play a role in carbon sequestration by managing the vast grassland areas in a way that keeps grass in a vegetative state. This practise is often referred to as mob grazing but it comes under many terms. Mob grazing is revitalising an old farming technique which might give us the answer to how we can reduce some of the carbon in the atmosphere.

Farming is about food production and in a changing world that is thinking more and more about how our food is produced I feel proud to be part of a group that is already conscious of sustainable goals and innovative in its thinking. If you would like to join us and be part of the movement please get in touch by emailing [joanne.leigh@fwagsw.org.uk](mailto:joanne.leigh@fwagsw.org.uk).

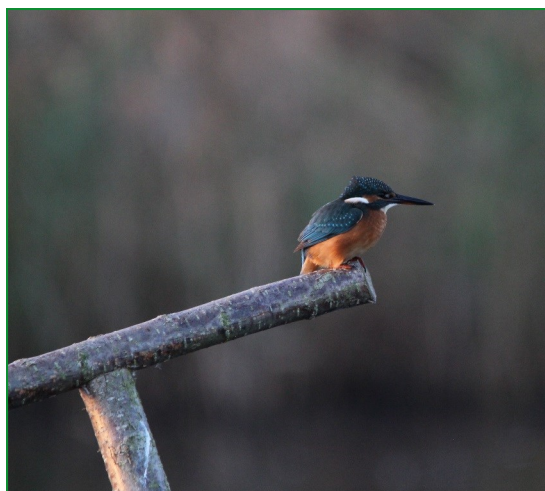
## Kemerton Clippings January 2020

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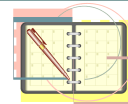
This newsletter is published bi-annually. The next edition will be issued in July 2020.

For more information on the work of KCT please visit our website: [www.kemerton.org](http://www.kemerton.org)



Female Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* on a perch, KLNR, November 2018

## Save the Date!



- **Saturday 1st February** - Working party (10am start, KLNR)
- **Saturday 29th February** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Wednesday 11th March** - 'Curlew & Other Breeding Waders in the Severn & Avon Vales' Slideshow & Talk, Eckington Village Hall (8pm start) - see 'News & Events' on website [www.kemerton.org](http://www.kemerton.org) for full event details
- **Saturday 28th March** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Saturday 18th April** - Dawn Chorus Walk, Aldwick Wood (5.45am start) - see 'News & Events' on website [www.kemerton.org](http://www.kemerton.org) for full event details
- **Saturday 25th April** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Saturday 30th May** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Sunday 14th June** - Orchid Walk, KLNR (2.30pm start) - see 'News & Events' on website [www.kemerton.org](http://www.kemerton.org) for full event details
- **Saturday 27th June** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)
- **Saturday 25th July** - Working party (10am start, location to be confirmed)

For details on any of the above events, please contact KCT Support Coordinator Kate Aubury by email [kate@kemerton.com](mailto:kate@kemerton.com) or by phone on 07765 334 776.

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### GOVERNORS

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