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**3.** I recently read your WRRC article suggesting to get rid of the water buffalo symbol, and since you invited comment I would like to offer mine. As a desert ecologist, I have just recently joined the water world. I came to hear and understand the term water buffalo early on in my new career. I have always taken the symbol to mean those who are strong enough, persistent enough, resilient enough and smart enough to carry the very heavy burden of managing one of our most precious and essential resources to all biological life. This is an extremely honorable term and I feel nothing but the highest respect being one who shares carrying that burden. Aren't we getting a little too "millennial sensitive" here? What else could the symbol be? A dolphin???

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**4.** In truth, I've always regarded the term as describing old white guys, politically conservative, exclusionary, and hide-bound. I've thought of it as the opposite of the more inclusive, forward thinking, holistic values that many of us, including you, try to promote. I think it's viewed by many as a group that seeks to have its way on all water matters without necessarily caring about the views of others. This is changing, obviously, and people like us are changing it, but it may not be a tradition one would want to preserve. Having said all that, as your letter points out, we've got way bigger things to worry about.

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**5.** I think the phrase was coined by Marc Reisner in *Cadillac Desert* in 1986 (or 1985). I know he used the term in the revised edition in 2003, seeming to refer back to the first edition... There is such an animal in Asia; it's mean and ornery and likes to camp out in mudholes and keep others away. It's a charming if obscure reference used by Reisner to criticize managers of western water districts for hoarding water by having senior rights to immense quantities and being unwilling to even consider letting others have some. Now, what is a Cadillac Desert?

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**6.** Without taking sides on such an important and controversial topic, I would only offer this definition which you can find on Google; "These words are symbolically associated with the water buffalo: Strength, Service, Dedication, Connection to Earth Mother."

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**7.** When I first heard the term, I thought of water buffaloes as beloved animals in Southeast Asia, patient and thorough. So I never had a negative impression of the term. (The Cape buffalo, on the other hand, is a dangerous animal.) And the people I met to whom that honorific was applied all seemed friendly and helpful. I did wonder if it was a term applied only to men, but if they gave you those things and didn't call you an affiliate, or an associate, or an honorary water buffalo, apparently not. My career has been in engineering, not water resources, so I remain an interested onlooker. Thanks for asking all of us!

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**8.** Power and money run with the water buffalo. The water world in Arizona has often been exclusionary. In my view, the water buffalo symbolizes that exclusionary world. I am glad you have created a space for some dialogue around symbols and words, but deeds and actions count more. The problem is not the symbology of the water buffalo, it is the history of ignoring the needs and concerns of a broader gamut of affected communities, particularly minorities and neighbors.

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**9.** I'm personally tired of people tearing down statues and history and creating new words that have no meaning. The only exclusivity about Water Buffaloes was that so few people actually cared about water. It wasn't a closed club, but few people wanted to participate. Now more people do and we need to expand the herd and bring in more water buffaloes – anyone and everyone who cares about water in Arizona. I can't believe the things people take "offense" at. Everyone is offended by something, and being a grown up means being tolerant and accepting or at least being receptive to ideas you don't necessarily agree with. I'd say it's an honor to be included in the Water Buffaloes – it means you care enough to do something. Where do I get a t-shirt?

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**10.** I suspect I might be referred to as a water buffalo, but I don't know if there is some sort of 'club' I have to be in, and I've never been formally indoctrinated as one.....I suspect the club is made up of mostly old white guys.....and that is not a picture of our future.....I hope it is not. Nope, I don't like the name water buffalo. It isn't native to the US. It doesn't belong in a desert. It is also now a domesticated animal tilling fields, producing milk and meat. I don't resonate with that picture. It is not environmentally friendly, as a domesticated animal. I support putting the term 'water buffalo' as it relates to water professionals in a museum, and finding another name for water professionals that better represents our world today that includes diversity, and environmental stewardship.

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**11.** As I sit and ponder the vagaries, challenges, and conundrums of this age of George Floyd, global pandemic, global warming/ extended drought, and Arizona's wildfire season – it occurs to me that despite my support for the concept of "Think Global/ Act Local" I must stifle a small yawn for the debate over water buffalo. I've been called one by some...folks (sometimes hard to tell if it's a good or bad thing they've got in mind) but I've never been initiated into the Order of the Buffalo Pin... the only place (aside from Governor Babbitt's remarks) I've ever heard the term used with any frequency had been CRWUA conferences. And, if you wanted to circulate amongst a larger collection of buffaloi, I don't know where you'd find them. In closing, I thoroughly comprehend and acknowledge the current need to re-examine our labels and referents. However, this is one I'm not really willing to expend any bullets on.

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**12.** Thanks for bringing up this discussion. I think when one talks about symbols, the true importance is always larger than the symbol itself. Any discussion of a symbol is ultimately about whatever it is that the symbol stands for. I always perceived the Water Buffalo symbol as a cutesy moniker that denotes a clique. There has always been a sense of cliquishness in the Arizona water management world anyway...One way members of a clique know who's in and who's out is by the language they use. The Arizona water clique uses (deliberately, I think) a very specialized and unique jargon that outsiders wouldn't have a full grasp of if at all. The use of the moniker "Water Buffalo" serves the same purpose as the jargon - to enhance the exclusivity of the club. I agree that it's time for the term to go, and I further assert that no replacement is needed. We don't need a mascot.

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**13.** I thought it was well written and wanted to offer a couple of thoughts. I would have been honored for someone to have thought of me as an Arizona Water Buffalo during my career. ...I had the typical initial reaction of "why do we need to change this". In looking up the definition of "water buffalo" on the internet, I came across this one: "Domesticated over 5,000 years ago, the water buffalo is used throughout China to plow the wet rice fields. The water buffalo thus came to symbolize strength, benevolence, patience, submissiveness, and steady toil." Anyone who has been involved with major water projects or major water legislation in this state has definitely had strength, patience, and plenty of "steady toil". And I'm sure benevolence fits in there as well, since the purpose of those who work in the water field is to improve the lives of the people who live and work here. I'm not sure that submissiveness fits, but matching 4 out of 5 qualities seems to be pretty good. In the last sentence of your article, you note that "...we can agree that our gatherings for debate and dialogue, whether in-person or virtual, will include more than the water buffalo." That statement made me think of our gatherings as an oasis, where different animals gather to get the water they need to survive. The water world has a lot of different animal types - eagles and hawks that soar above the earth to get a big picture view of the landscape and have the vision to plan for what's needed; the water buffaloes whose steady toil keeps projects or legislation moving over long periods of time; beavers who build water infrastructure projects; and desert tortoises (engineers) who slowly but steadily get projects designed and problems solved, but who may retreat into their shell when asked to engage with politicians or the public at large - just to provide a few examples. So maybe there is no one animal to describe all of us. Maybe a better symbol is a water drop. Living in a desert environment, we know that every drop of water is important, and they are all unique in some way. Put together, they can form lakes and rivers, provide water supply for millions of people, and create an energy source (hydropower) for many communities in the desert Southwest. Maybe those who rise to the level of "Water Buffalo" can be known as "Thunderclouds". Or something else. Just some ideas for thought - although, I'd still be honored to be considered a Water Buffalo!

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**14.** Thank you for your reflection on retiring the water buffalo symbol. I absolutely agree the symbol should be retired. I have never related to this and in my mind water buffalo equaled an exclusive old boys club that was not open to new ideas (and focused on expensive engineered solutions to water management). I'm not sure that we need a new symbol. I think we need a new culture, that is inclusive, engages the community, hears diverse voices, and ensures water management is open to the people - and not left to the "experts." Thank you for asking for feedback.

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**15.** Unreal, you all need to stay focused on what's important! Keep the Water Buffalo and to hell with stereotypes!

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**16.** WRT the water buffalo question. As someone who will never be one but who is very often surrounded by them, I think it is a great term for the in-crowd of experts and should be kept. Implicitly it conveys the water buffalo's commitment, contribution achievement and personal cost for the greater good. I actually think that is an exemplary way to be *inclusive* and *to include* within your community. Though of course by definition being a water buffalo means you are part of an exclusive club, and that can be completely fine so long as it clear and transparent how one gets to join that "club" and what it is a nickname for having achieved professionally. So long as "membership" is not used in a discriminatory and systemically racist way. It must also be politically inclusionary in every and any way if academics or local, state and/or federal employees are to be included as water buffalos. When used at conferences like yours I do think the term should not be used by speakers, *unless* it is clearly defined and used for a reason that helps the audience (e.g. one of your PhD students or an undergrad political science student) understand a point and how they could aspire to be a part of this esteemed group. BTW, water buffalos are not aggressive animals at all. Cape buffalo are aggressive human killers...Water buffalo take on the hardest physical work in many parts of the world where people cannot afford machines to provide this superhuman energy and in environments where machines just cannot do the work.

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**17.** To me, the term or reference has always been associated with someone who has a long record of working in the Arizona water arena. To me, I always associate it with time, commitment, experience, and a lot of accumulated lessons. The person referred to as the WB is a veteran of the water arena in Arizona. Anyone who can survive that environment has some endurance/fortitude and probably a thick hide, like a literal WB. I have been around the term in Arizona for...seasons in the ag field where water has been at the center of everything we do. I did not know there was a formal club until ~ [X]years ago. Even if you did away with the formal group, the name and reference would continue and rightfully so in my view. Interesting discussion - thanks for sharing.

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**18.** Just a perspective, I was told...that the water buffalo symbolized the water policy people because the buffalos would often fight among themselves, but when threatened from the outside, they would immediately set individual differences aside to protect the herd. I would suggest a mascot that recognizes disputes among individual interests will arise, but that focuses on the long-term protection of "the herd". Not sure exactly what that mascot might be, but since water buffalos are generally irritable and can be obnoxious, a new symbol may be more reflective of today's water policy leaders.

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**19.** I'd be glad to have us deem the "Water Buffalo's" as the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century water leaders in the Colorado Basin states ... but to also deem that a new type of more inclusive and open leadership is needed for the future ... one requiring resilience in the face of significant uncertainty both in our hydrology and the future of our economies and communities. Stubborn, single minded pursuit of narrow objectives (a hallmark of water buffalos) is no longer what we need. Water Gazelle's perhaps ... or maybe just community leaders who care about water (ok so we probably need something that at least could be turned into a catchy acronym).

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**20.** I've heard about the term "Water Buffalo" but never really knew the detailed meaning of it and now that I see that most of it is negative. For the Plains people, the Buffalo or more correctly Bison is a sacred animal.

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**21.** I...read your essay about the water buffalo. I enjoyed it! -- it was both light hearted and funny, but also very serious and timely. I can tell you that I always appreciate the effort to make certain spaces feel more inclusive to others who may feel like "outsiders." I don't know if it was how I was raised, but I often feel like that and I know many around me do too. So thank you for breaking down barriers. It's more timely now than ever.

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**22.** I'm not one to normally speak up and would much rather listen and learn, but thought I'd put in my 2 cents on this one. You characterized it well when you introduced this subject, essentially very pressing and relevant concerns were not discussed and a symbol took center stage. For someone who has been involved in water resources since 1985 I find this pettiness silly and condescending. This seems just one more example of left-leaning folks who choose to be offended seemingly to divert attention and resources from relevant issues and subvert a tradition because they have not been officially designated a 'water buffalo'. I have never been officially welcomed into this brotherhood / sisterhood and feel no worse for it. I heard a quote and unfortunately don't know who to attribute it to. "In any argument those with the greater intelligence are always wrong because they did not use their intelligence to avoid the argument in the first place." Let's be smart and choose to channel our intelligence and resources into topics and challenges that will make a difference for generations to come and not to placate the whims of a small group who chooses to argue over irrelevant issues.

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**23.** Your observations about "water buffalo" symbolism brought up some interesting thoughts. I recall first being exposed to the terminology when...I was interested in how water decisions were being made. I was told... - "don't worry about it - the Water Buffaloes of [X] have it all figured out". Timing is everything and over the ...years have watched and learned how water decisions are made...Should the term be "retired"? I think the time has come. While they still exist - case in point is the ongoing discussion of who should and who cannot be in the "room" for the development of the DCP and 2026 Guidelines shows that there still exists a hierarchy of dialogue and decisions on water. I also think that this topic exposes an interesting line of thinking that deserves to be explored as the West (and Arizona) deals with our water futures. Sociologically this is a fascinating new topic to explore. Good job on raising it.

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**24.** Lawyer XX used the term water buffalo as a term of derision for the water developers of the past who loved to wallow in as much water as they possibly could, even beyond what was necessary. That is the definition I've always associated with the term. I reserve the term, much like XX did, for irresponsible water project development.

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**25.** Years ago, when I first heard the term water buffalo, the way it was explained to me, water buffalos sounded like another "good ole boys" network; an exclusive group of white men with power over water, and who had it, and who wouldn't get it. Power always implies money. When I finally found out that a couple of water buffalos were women, it changed my perception slightly, but the thought of it being an exclusive "club" of power people was still there. I wondered, "How do you get to be a water buffalo?" and basically assumed it would be a status not attained by anyone outside the power structure. It seemed obvious, you could only be chosen to be part of the group. So in that sense, it felt elitist. On the other hand, if you look at the history of water here in the state (or elsewhere), you can also see where the term connotes a high degree of respect for people who've dedicated their lives to tackle tough water issues. They do their best to ensure their State has water resources. Looking at the term itself, I am not offended by the term water buffalo... My only issue with the term is related to the felt sense of elitism. It leaves me with the questions of "How can I become a water buffalo?" or "What does it take to become a water buffalo?" "Is there room for more at the table or is it just for the chosen few?" These thoughts led me to think about diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. How many minorities or indigenous people are water buffalos? Shouldn't they have a seat at the table too? So if I had to change anything about the term, I'd say the group should be less exclusive and more inclusive. It should be open to anyone who works tirelessly in the field of water to promote the best interests of the public.

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**26.** I guess I'll always be an old Water Buffalo and consider the use of it for those who have spent a lifetime resolving water issues and problems as a tribute and matter of respect to those so recognized. Water buffalos can be aggressive, as are all mammals when the need arises. But they are a communal herd animal. I have spent time among them in XX and treasure that experience. Water buffalos persist in spite of mankind's predation. Those who fear or object to use of the Water Buffalo do so because they aren't really Water Buffalos. They should consider an alternative name for themselves. How about the Water Ducks or some other choice cause even ducks can be aggressive and bad tempered under certain circumstances. I think the conference discussion on this matter should be considered interesting debate...but should not be considered a call to action.

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**27.** Amen. The term conjures a hopefully outdated and elitist (read: white male) approach to water management. If we are looking to promote an inclusive and equitable approach to managing water resources, the term has no place in our conversation. Enough said. And thanks for raising this issue!

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**28.** This is an interesting perspective you wrote. I had never heard the term water buffalo and I don't know anyone associated with the group, so I'm not one to comment on its legacy or exclusivity. It sounds like the group's intent was to protect AZ water (something we all strive for) during a time when crucial decisions needed to be made. Perhaps it is time to open the dialogue with fresh, diverse views on how to best move forward with protecting our water resources, and somehow preserve the work the group had laid out.

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**29.** First, I'd like to say thank you for drafting a very thought provoking commentary about the use of the term Water Buffalo as a symbol of those who care about or are involved in water policy or its management in Arizona. As requested, I would like to provide my views regarding your July 10, 2020 Reflections commentary where you asked if it's time to retire the Water Buffalo Symbol? My simplest answer to your question, is No. Like many of us, I have worked in the Arizona water policy/management business for the past XX years and have seen the Water Buffalo term used ubiquitously over my tenure as your Reflections article mentions. You eloquently conveyed that some colleagues in a Happy Hour you attended expressed disdain for the term's use to describe those in the water business. You also referenced comments from a CAP 2004 Annual Report that "like the water buffalo, these Water Buffalos plodded along and would not be deterred from accomplishing their goals". I think the comments are a fair caricature of how that term has been used over time. However, I would like to submit that there is more to the Water Buffalo reference than what was mentioned or your Happy Hour participants conveyed with their interpretation of its use. Over the years I...share the parallels, metaphorically speaking, between the behaviors of the Water Buffalo and how we conduct water management/policy in our State. So hopefully these will resonate, eh? We know Water Buffalos seem to enjoy a good wallow while hanging out either within or adjacent to water. The parallel, metaphorically speaking, to using this term is that we all like to hang out together at conferences or after a meeting, where we often congregate in groups, commonly at happy hours, discussing and debating the water management/policy issues of day. Sound familiar? Additionally, the Water Buffalo moves slowly and often together in herds. The parallel here is that any changes to water policy or its management, especially at the State-level, is best made on a consensus basis (where we move collectively as a herd) and the decisions we make to change a policy or management practice are best never made in haste. That is, the changes we make are slow and intentional, similar to the actions of the Water Buffalo. I am disappointed to think that some believe the Water Buffalo symbol lacks inclusivity or is no longer a term of endearment for those in the Arizona water business. I hope my additional parallels, metaphorically speaking, will help them better understand its use? I for one, will continue to embrace the use of this term to describe myself, and hopefully others (?) who care about or are involved in water policy or its management in Arizona. Lastly, I would like to thank you for bringing this topic forward and allowing the opportunity for the thought provoking dialogue it deserves...

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**30.** I agree the 'water buffalo' should be retired. To me, it not only speaks to an exclusive club, but also to a 'stuck in your ways' mentality, and our future water management solutions require broader thinking and innovation. I don't know why, but I think of the buffalo digging her hooves in the dirt and being unmovable, and that's not a great representation.

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**31.** I suggest that the "water buffalo" be retired. It is not native. In Australia, the water buffalo has been a major environmental disaster in the wetlands of the top end of the Northern Territory; they eat large volumes of grasses and other plants, removing this food source for native wildlife, and they can damage the trees they regularly rub against. Something like this might be more inclusive – maybe multiple colored hand or b/w generic.



**32.** A respondent pointed me to a 2014 entry on CAP's website, which starts off by saying: Just what is a water buffalo? In Arizona, they are those iconic figures who had the foresight to plan ahead to meet the water needs of a growing desert community. Without them, we might not have the Central Arizona Project and the state's water situation might be bleak. It goes on to direct people to oral histories and goes on to note: There you'll see the stories of several water buffalos come to life: Bruce Babbitt, Jack Pfister, John Rhodes, Stuart Udall and more. There are about 40 oral histories recorded thus far, with more planned for the future. So this Thanksgiving, CAP raises a water toast to those water buffalos responsible for putting CAP water on tables across much of Arizona.

[to <https://www.cap-az.com/public/blog/272-cap-thankful-for-arizonas-water-buffalos>](https://www.cap-az.com/public/blog/272-cap-thankful-for-arizonas-water-buffalos)

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33. I believe that water buffaloes are misunderstood and stereotyped. I was interested to learn that they are quite social and typically led by a dominant female. The females are very protective of their young. Younger males travel in male groups, but older males tend to hang out with the females. They are related to cows and herbivores. Some are endangered.

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34. I like the water buffalo term and don't think we need to change it. Water Buffaloes - Farm Animals Facts & News by World Animal Foundation

<https://worldanimalfoundation.org/advocate/farm-animals/params/post/1280085/water-buffaloes>

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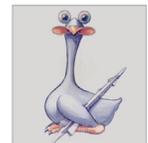
35. Second set of comments from an individual: It is interesting to read your two pieces together, along with the feedback you've gotten so far on the Water Buffalos. I see a somewhat unaddressed tension between the desire (and need) for more inclusivity in decision-making, and the importance of relationships. Of course it's not surprising that those in the inner circles of decision-making emphasize the importance of relationships and face-to-face interaction. Those things *are* incredibly important, but also a bit self-serving. Ironically, in some cases the remote work experience has expanded the relationship-building opportunities by lowering barriers to participation (which you point out) and providing glimpses into our non-professional lives... Those kinds of humanizing things can be essential when navigating difficult issues. But the shared experiences, common vocabulary, inside jokes and technical trivia among the insiders are the very things that can also be barriers to participation. These are in fact the quintessential characteristics that I associate with the less endearing attributes of the Water Buffalos. Moreover, there are inherent scale limitations of personal relationship building. Scaling-up decision-making often comes down to processes and institutions, and that is where I see the greatest challenges for Arizona water professionals (and our society more broadly, but that's for another day). On the one hand, even though it was incredibly messy, the Arizona DCP process had most of the hallmarks of a good process, and set the template for things to come...To my mind, the thing that ties together the themes of personal relationship building and institutional-scale processes, is trust. From my rather narrow perch, there's work to be done on building confidence, establishing facts, and perhaps most importantly, finding ways to extract and convey meaning from issues that have all the dimensions of wickedness...Ultimately the weightiest decisions will still be made by a small group of people who work, and sometimes eat, together. But only if those that are quite literally not at the table have enough trust in those people, the institutions they work for, and the processes they have put in place.

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36. I saw your short post on Waterwired on the term, water buffalo. Predating its use among water professionals, the U.S. Army used the term to refer to this, <https://www.armyproperty.com/Equipment-Info/Water-Buffalo.htm>, a 400 gallon, towable, water tank. These units have since been replaced by the Camel II, <https://asc.army.mil/web/portfolio-item/cs-css-unit-water-pod-system-camel-ii/>. I am not sure what symbol might replace the non-Army water buffalo, but perhaps the term, water doyen.

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37. On the Buffalo issue, I always thought it an apt description. Lumbering, slow witted and male. The folks who for years kept the secrets of water law and policy carefully guarded secrets. Now that the internet and other technology make water materials widely available, another word is needed Water minnows? Water ouzels? Water snakes? Or my personal favorite the water dippers (Nike missile optional).



38. Should we call ourselves water nymphs? Or water lilies? Or water bugs? Or water snakes? Or zanjeros? Or Cape Buffalo (much more dangerous)? I, for one, don't care what you call me as long as you don't call me late for dinner.

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39. Oh, yes. Way overdue.

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