

The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610; 510/238-2290; lmi@netwiz.net; lakemerrittinstitute.org

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SANTA COMES TO LAKE MERRITT

Ho, Ho, Ho was heard on the Lake Chalet dock this year as Santa took time from his busy schedule to find out what our little ones want for Christmas. Bea Sandri (shown here) was the first to visit him and admire the Institute's annual display, which included a lighthouse for the first time. The polar bear was back, as was the deer and the duck. Hot cider, gondola rides and a photographer rounded out the festivities. Maybe next year there will be a choir. Kudos to Diane Fristrom for the photo, and of course to Santa himself.

A CONVERSATION WITH LAKE MERRITT: "I really am immortal you know, said the Lake. I've been around since the end of the last ice age, more than 10,000 years ago. Oh, I've changed a bit in that time, but even immortals do that. It got a little dicey there for a while when some of your more aggressive types dumped Oakland's sewage into me and wanted to fill me in to make a train station, but those were dumb ideas that didn't work. So I live on, and will do so, at least until sea level rises again and I re-join mother ocean."

"So what is life like for an immortal Lake" I asked.

"I must admit it has gotten better lately" he said. "My sustenance (runoff from the hills) has been pretty nasty since you all came along, but now it doesn't have quite as much bad stuff, although the plastic tastes bad and the car wash soap gives me gas and make bubbles. I still feel a little cramped around the edges and I miss the marshes and mudflats that used to be there, but the best thing is that my aorta opened up a little when that bloody 12th Street dam got knocked down. The tidal blood comes and goes a bit faster now. That

let's me better feed the little parasitic birds, fish and critters I support.”

“What about all the good things people have done to you lately?”

“Oh go ahead and dress me up. I like the fountains, new trees, boats and fancy buildings; they make this ancient body look great. They show me that people care enough to give of themselves to support me, which is good not only for them but also the whole City of Oakland.”

“But I still hurt in places you know. Those little, cancerous boat docks at Grand & Harrison Street and the Bandstand Beach are badly in need of serious surgery. They're not really me you know. You all put them in me so why don't you take care of them? Diseases like that can cause other problems, like people falling through the rotted wood.”

“So can we count on you to still be a beautiful wildlife refuge in the future?”

“You surely can. I was here long before any of your species, and I hope to be around after you're gone.”



Merritt's lagoon supports many forms of life. Soon there will be another in the hundreds of thousands of generations of new life that depend on our Lake for their sustenance.

People care about things that need our help, such as this tiny duckling, which was re-united with its family soon after this photo was taken.

IF YOU NEED A TAX DEDUCTION – REMEMBER THE LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

Something tax like comes this way in April. But if you want to re-direct some of it to support the Lake instead of Uncle Sam, please make a generous donation to the Institute, a 501(c) 3, non-profit corporation. Checks may be sent to 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610 or via PayPal at our website. Thank you!

CLIMATE CORNER: Many of us were recently privileged to see a movie about the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, one of our great thinkers, writers and presidents. But if Abe were alive today, what would he be saying? Perhaps it would be something like this:

“Two hundred years ago our civilization embarked on a new way of life, dedicated to the proposition that we could burn as much fossil fuel as we wanted. Now we are engaged in a great planetary crisis, testing whether our people, or any people so dedicated and so selfish, can long endure.

We are met on many battlefields. We are assaulted by famine, by drought and by our own people as we struggle to find common cause with the earth. Our enemies are greenhouse gases released

from cars, melting permafrost and the destruction of forests; the hurricanes that assault our coastlines; the raging floods; region wide storms; and indeed, our very selves.

Our jet streams have shifted, our acidified sea levels are rising and our deserts are spreading. As they do, the wealthy are fleeing the ravages of collapsed economies, of disease, and of our dislocated citizens. Fleeing to protected areas, secure in the profits of their despoliation.

But in a larger sense, can we control not only our self destiny, but also the Earth? Can we reverse the centuries of technology gone astray? We can. We must; for our very lives depend upon it. We do this not only for our selves, but also for our children, their children, and their children's children; the people and the life of this planet.

On this day we resolve that the policies of the past, the nationalism and discounting of environmental costs which have brought our civilization to the brink, shall be changed: That this world shall henceforth be dedicated to controlling climate destruction; and that the people, and all other forms of life, shall not perish from the earth."

If that sounds harsh, note the preponderance of high temperature records set this year and last year relative to low records. This data is from the National Climatic Data Center (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/>). So far, 2012 is stacking up to be the warmest year on record in the United States.

Recent Records Totals

	Period	Hi Max	Hi Min	Lo Max	Lo Min	Precip*	Snow*
Yesterday	Dec 26, 2012	8	2	59	3	162	118
Last 7 Days	Dec 20 - 26, 2012	115	45	134	40	821	644
Last 30 Days	Nov 27 - Dec 26, 2012	1,880	2,362	208	146	2,461	1,202
Last 365 Days	Dec 28, 2011 - Dec 26, 2012	34,350	32,443	8,988	6,361	27,563	4,566
Month to Date	Dec 1 - 26, 2012	1,758	2,125	190	121	2,314	1,174
Year to Date	Jan 1 - Dec 26, 2012	33,990	32,123	8,983	6,355	27,278	4,529
Last Year to Date	Jan 1 - Dec 26, 2011	26,237	29,364	15,700	9,656	33,370	9,427

*Precipitation and Snow totals DO NOT include trace values.

BIRD COLUMN: Braving the Rain at Lake Merritt

The December fourth-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk drew six intrepid birders - joining the two leaders for one of the best walks of the year, despite the prediction of rain. It did rain, too, but it was also sunny by turns, and the lake birds don't care about the weather.

We spotted the Tufted Duck - or at least *a* Tufted Duck; this one seemed to be a young male, with only mostly white sides to go with his black back and the merest whisper of a tuft, while earlier reports had described a bird with a solid pony-tail on his head. On the way were two or three Mew Gulls - the rarely seen visitors that make the Ring-Billed Gulls (normally the smallest of the gulls at the lake) look big and burly. We saw six Common Mergansers, which are usually not common at all, including two males all dressed up for the holidays with white backs, green heads, and red beaks. And a Forster's Tern was showing off a fine set of red legs on the floats, near a lone lorn Double-Crested Cormorant that apparently hadn't noticed that all the cormorantish brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts had left the lake for the season.

Sadly, we encountered a group of visitors to the lake fishing a dead Brown Pelican out of the water, and one of them explained that it had starved to death because the water was so polluted it killed the fish. We pointed out the thriving ecosystem and said the lake is remarkably clean for a city-bound body of water, and suggested that the young bird might well have dived into shallow water and broken its neck - Brown Pelicans feed by dropping like bombs from twenty or thirty feet up, and large areas of the lake are little more than a pelican body-length deep. Others had by that point placed the bird in a trash container, so we parted in gentle disagreement on that point, and much shared affection for the lake.

The trees in Lakeside Park were quiet - most of the birds apparently distrusting the bits of sun that showed up during the morning - but still all told we saw forty-five species of birds - including a live Brown Pelican, perched on the boathouse roof like the world's biggest and shaggiest seagull - and generally had a fine morning at Lake Merritt, where every morning is fine, even when it storms....

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment from visitors about the Lake being so polluted that a pelican starved to death is exactly why we end our educational presentations with a question: What is Lake Merritt's biggest problem? The answer is: "Ignorance."



RESCUE TEDDY: There is a story here, but Teddy isn't talking. We found him in the water by the Bandstand Beach the day before Christmas. Perhaps he was lost. Maybe a jilted lover abandoned him or someone grew tired of him. So we got him cleaned up; but Teddy still isn't talking. Does anybody want a rescued teddy bear?



RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE



Hello, I'm a great blue heron: Who are you?



This statue of Abe was run over by a car in December. Public Works saved the bust and we hope it will be restored. Photo by John Kirkmire.

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