

Tidings
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 Lake Merritt Institute
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To contribute to the Lake
 Merritt Institute, contact
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We're on the Web!
 Visit us at:
www.lakemerrittinstitute.org

Spring at Lake Merritt continued...

problem in Lake Merritt. When the algae rots, nitrogen is released which then fertilizes the growth of plankton, more algae, widgeon grass and wireweed. Algae and other microorganisms use oxygen to consume the nutrients, leading to algae blooms and low-oxygen conditions that are detrimental to other aquatic organisms.

A City contractor operates a harvester that collects algae and widgeongrass during their growing seasons. The harvesting season is from April through August. The Lake Merritt Institute makes an effort to remove algae in areas inaccessible by the harvester. The harvester is deployed daily during the harvesting season. (More information on this, such as amounts harvested, may be available through Dr. Bailey with LMI)As part of Measure DD projects, various water quality control measures have been proposed, including the installation of devices and features to clean and circulate water and the creation of an open channel to allow for increased tidal flow into and out of the Lake. These measures, by improving water quality in the Lake, would enhance the scenic qualities of the waterway (including portions of the Lake visible from I-580).

¹ Carson, Rachel, 1907-1964. "The Sea Around Us," New York: Oxford University Press, 1950



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THE LAKE MERRITT
INSTITUTE AN URBAN RUNOFF AND
 WATERSHED RESEARCH CENTER

TIDINGS
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Earth Day, a Natural Celebration!

By Kaletha Patterson

Imagine if it took 364 days for the earth to cleanse itself and on the 365th day of each year, we had one opportunity to enjoy a pure environment; an environment free of chemicals, pollution, debris, trash, waste and clutter.

Can you envision an orderly world in which every person on a daily basis dedicated their time to polishing the environment in which they live?

On April 19 everyone will have the opportunity to make a difference in their community by investing their time through Earth Day activities and celebrations.

Numerous events will abound throughout San Francisco and Oakland with the traditional cleanup at Lake Merritt.

Cookie Robles-Wong, Oakland's Earth Day Coordinator, explained that in addition to cleaning up on the shoreline of the lake, volunteers also have the opportunity to take boats out onto the water in order to gather debris directly off the Lake.

One never knows what they're bound to find when looking for recyclables and other trash items. Last year's most interesting find was a bird cage. By some accounts, the original creation of Earth Day began in the City of San Francisco in 1969 when a man named John McConnell decided to honor the earth on the equinox of March 21, which is the day on which the United Nations and other some other international organizations still observe the event. The date on which now celebrate Earth Day was memorialized in 1970 by then U.S. Senator Gaylord

Nelson who called for an environmental teach-in on April 22nd. Take a look these days and you will notice people are actively seeking and participating in programs to create a thriving and sustainable environment. New approaches for going "green" can be seen in all avenues of life from fashion and architecture to farming and industrial product design.

We have inherited this precious earth and it is our duty to take care of it. We don't need to wait for one particular day every year to honor the earth. We can show our dedication on a daily basis by cleaning the streets, removing our trash, picking up litter and eliminating unnecessary waste and pollution. As consumers we can recycle, cut emissions by walking and bicycling and enrich our bodies by eating and growing organic.

We can do this collectively and independently by becoming responsible individuals aimed at celebrating ourselves and each other.

For more information on Earth Day activities, please visit this Web site: www.oaklandearthday.com.

Spring Is Right Around the Corner

By Lakshmi Rajagopalan

As spring arrives, check out how Rachel Carson described spring coming to the aquatic world by reading the old classic "The Sea Around Us." Published in 1951, one of the most successful books written about the aquatic world, Carson's work takes the reader through a series of fascinating scenes such as the newly formed Earth cooling beneath an endlessly overcast sky, the centuries of nonstop rain that created the oceans, and incredibly powerful tides moving 100 billion tons of water daily in the Bay of Fundy. We learn how islands are born, how mountain ranges rivaling any on land parade between continental masses, how sediments of every conceivable variety coat the floor of the sea, how the shape of one continent mirrors the face of another, how tides come and go pushed by the immense power of the sun and the moon, how the Gulf Stream makes its restless journey to and fro in the Atlantic.

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Spring at Lake Merritt

By Lakshmi Rajagopalan

For Lake Merritt, spring means shoreline algae, lots of critters in the warming shallow water such as red polychaete worms twirling at the surface as they spawn and lay eggs. Normal tidal flows become more common as the threat of flood subsides, reducing the chance of odors. Underwater, widgeon grass growth begins in April and becomes noticeable in May. Algae, absent in March, dominates the shallows in May. From high-rise buildings, the shallow shoreline may appear as green as a lawn. Algal growth is a result of excess nitrate runoff from landscapes within the Lake Merritt watershed. This excess nitrate winds up in various creeks and eventually drains into the Lake, because the Lake is part of Oakland's flood control system and all the freshwater runoff in the 4,000 acre Lake Merritt watershed drains into the Lake.

Although harmless and a natural phenomenon, the decay of the algae can contribute to the oxygen

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Spring Is Right Around the Corner continued...

Today, with the oceans endangered by the dumping of medical waste and ecological disasters such as the Exxon oil spill in Alaska, this illuminating volume provides a timely reminder of both the fragility and the importance of the ocean and the life that abounds within it. Anyone who loves the sea or who is concerned about our natural environment will want to read this classic work.

Storm Drain Markers

By Lakshmi Rajagopalan



Storm Drains

According to the EPA, over 60% of our water pollution comes from urban and agricultural stormwater runoff (non-point source pollution). Many people unknowingly believe storm drains connect to sewer treatment systems. Whatever enters the drains is discharged directly into a neighboring body of water without benefit of treatment. That is often a local lake, river or bay.

Storm drain marking benefits Lake Merritt by making residents aware of the connection between the Lake and the Bay. It alerts others to the fate of stormwater runoff and the pollution carried with it from lawns and streets. Storm drain markers are a way of labeling storm drain inlets with messages warning citizens not to dump polluting materials such as litter, soapy water, and motor oil into these drains. Storm drain markers alone will not solve water pollution problems, but they are a practical, positive, easy first step. Markers work to raise citizen awareness of storm drain connections to local lakes and rivers. (For example, people who see marked drains know where their water went, compared to those who have not seen a storm drain marker.)

The Monthly Bird Report

By Hilary Powers

Escape from the Tropics

None of the 14 people on the regular 4th-Wednesday walk in March could identify a bird that was hopping around by Children's Fairyland. It was seen with a couple of White-crowned Sparrows and was about the same size or a little larger, behaving much as they did (screaming) but it was bright butter yellow all over except for grayish wing primaries and tail feathers and a bit of orange frosting around its forehead. What could it be?

Just 12 minutes after I posted the question to the local bird sightings list (<http://www.diabloaudubon.com/mailman2/listinfo/sightings>), someone came back with the answer: a Saffron Finch – a tropical bird probably escaped from someone's aviary. Google Images provides a lot of confirming photos, if you'd like to see the mystery.

Elsewhere spring is springing around the Lake – the annual nesting season is in business on the surviving island trees, and this is the time to see Double-crested Cormorants wearing their double crests. They'll breed well into the summer, but the crests are likely to be gone by late April or early May.

Unfortunately it looks like the egret rookery has failed again this year. We saw only one Great Egret – the big white heron with the yellow beak and black legs – and no Snowy Egrets (the little ones with the black beaks and yellow feet) at all.

The Black-crowned Night Herons are here, but in much smaller numbers than prior years.



Saffron Finch



White-crowned Sparrow

The Ruddy Duck drakes are turning ruddy – auburn red, with black caps, white cheeks, and bright blue bills – and the Eared Grebes are putting on their blue-steel party clothes and gold eye fans. The Black Phoebe has returned to her nest on the building beside the park truck yard, and the Anna's Hummingbirds are chasing each other like self-propelled bullets.

The winter visitors are starting to depart, but most species still had some representatives around – even a female Common Goldeneye, probably the last of that species left on the Lake. Lots of Greater and Lesser Scaup, lots of Clark's and Western Grebes, a few Canvasbacks, and the wonderful Tufted Duck who's been hanging out by the Nature Center for the last couple of months.

They'll all be gone by May or June and the Lake will be down to Canada Geese and Mallards for a few months, then the variety will start to build up again. But whatever month and whatever day it is, it'll be a good day to visit Lake Merritt.



Anna's Hummingbird