

The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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VOLUME XV

"TIDINGS" - APRIL, 2010

ISSUE IV

12TH STREET PROJECT TO START IN MAY: Hold on to your hats. After full council approval last month, Measure DD funded re-construction of the 12th Street dam/roadway is scheduled to begin on about May 1st. Gone will be the stinky tunnels. Gone will be the pedestrian-incompatible lanes of traffic changing lanes at 40 miles per hour. Gone will be the four tunnel bottleneck that (along with 10th Street) chokes off tidal flow. In their place will be a regular city street, divided, with bus lanes and controlled by *two* stoplights. A wide tunnel below an elevated bridge will allow passage of small boats and pedestrians on each side. It will be open between the lanes of traffic above so as to let in the light of day and Laney College patrol cars may even drive through it to discourage vandalism. Bravo.



Work will begin on the Kaiser convention side and auto/bicycle traffic will not be totally shut down during the multi year construction schedule.

Built in 1956 before the freeway, the 12th St. dam (at left of the Lake in photo) will be replaced by a larger park, city street and wide tidal tunnel.

When the other channel bottlenecks are removed, we may even see an occasional sea lion or seal in the Lake. After all, they were here first.

PARK MAINTENANCE: From the Minutes of the Measure DD Community Coalition meeting on 3/15/10 - Presentation by Susan Montak, Oakland Parks Coalition (OPC):

The state of City Parks is changing each day since the budget cutbacks started. Although OPC did a survey in September 2009 and the effects of reduced staff were not seen then, sharp changes have occurred since. In 1989-1990 fiscal year the City supported 98 gardeners, all full time. Today there are 50 full time gardeners and 22 part-time employees. Not only has there been a reduction in staff, there has been an increase in park acreage.

The City has set up a priority list – first category will receive routine maintenance, and to qualify for that category there must have been a new capital improvement within the last

five years. The second category will have maintenance reduced by half. Maintenance of the medians may become an annual item. There is scheduled a median maintenance campaign in April/May of this year.

OPC has a steward program so that each of the Council districts has one volunteer steward to help coordinate clean-up efforts by volunteers. Barbara Newcombe asked if the stewards could create a team. Susan said there is some of that happening now. Susan had some handouts on the Park Stewardship program. To find out who the steward is for your district, go to www.oaklandparkscoalition.org as they are eager to enlist new volunteers!

LOST SOMETHING?



Among the recent items found in Lake Merritt:

A Remington, 16 gauge sawed off shotgun

A hot water bottle.

Two driver's licenses

An I-phone

A circuit board

An arm (plastic)

A country music CD (it works!)

An Arizona State Flag

Join us! You never know what you will find.

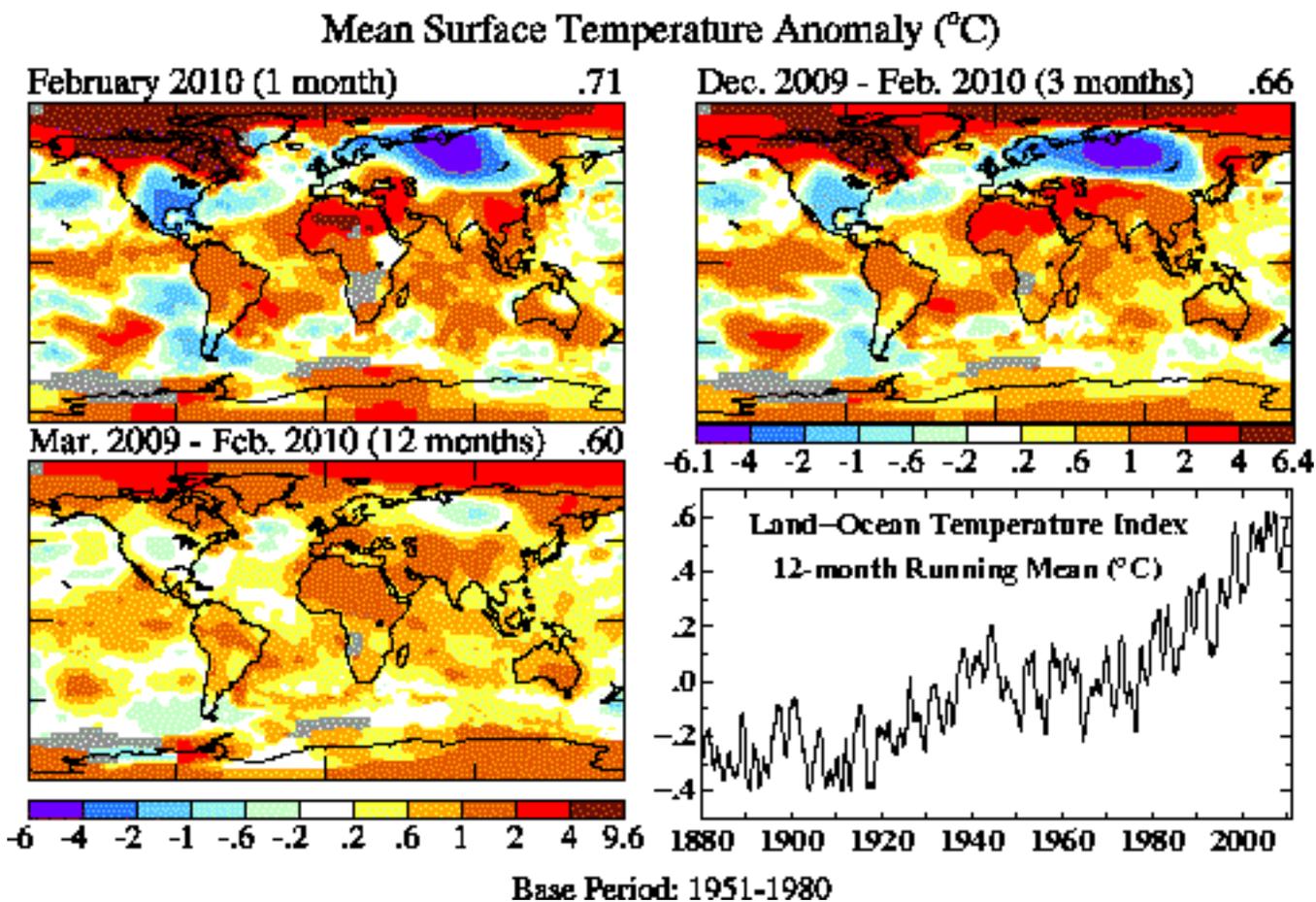
EARTH DAY – 40 YEARS: The first Earth Day was held in 1970 when our planet wide population was 3.7 billion. Today, there are 6.8 billion people on the globe, an 83% increase in just 40 years! That may be part of the reason why there is more trash around, but you can do something about it. Lake Merritt is a featured location for Oakland's Earth Day on April 17th, 9 am to noon. Once again we will offer you nets to remove trash from the Lake, scrapers to remove barnacles from a storm drain barrier, a few things to paint and aeration fountains to clean. Note that other locations also need your help, including the Rose Garden, Sausal Creek, Knowland Park at the Oakland Zoo, Peralta Hacienda Park, and Arroyo Viejo Park/Creek. For more information: www.oaklandearthday.com

SHORT NOTES: A small, cold python being harassed by seagulls was rescued from the Lake by Head Naturalist Stephanie Benevidez last month. Both the snake and Steph are now doing fine. And since we have had normal winter rains (so far) as opposed to 2007-09 (which were dry); will widgeon grass re-appear in June? We have hardly seen any since 2006. Stay tuned to this newsletter, or come on down to the Lake and find out.

LEGAL TRAPPING? Does the March 18, 1870 state law making Lake Merritt a wildlife refuge mean that the state Department of Fish & Game cannot issue a legal permit to trap fish in the Lake? We have asked for an opinion from the DFG and the city attorney.

CLIMATE CORNER (dedicated to keeping sea level below Lake Merritt): The graphs below are taken from: *Storms of My Grandchildren* by James Hansen, December, 2009.

"If It's That Warm, How Come It's So Darned Cold?". As you can see from recent 1 month, 3 month and 12 month data, much of the US had a colder than normal winter. But elsewhere, in much of the rest of the world, average temperatures were 0.2 to a whopping 4+°C warmer than the base period (1951–1980). No formal temperature records are kept for Lake Merritt, but it is likely the waters were as much as a half degree C warmer.



BIRD COLUMN - What a Day, What a Day at the Lake:

The biggest event of the March 24th-Wednesday bird walk was the colony of Double-crested Cormorants, crowded cheek-by-jowl onto the remaining dead trees on the islands (the prime real estate) and overflowing into the living trees. They like a room with a view, it seems - one bird has even wedged a dozen or so sticks onto the broken stump of the tree that fell last winter and is using that for a nest. They're worth a trip to see, as they're in the midst of the 8 to 10 weeks a year that they live up to their name. The rest of the year their heads are as smooth as snakes, but now the adults have twin crests like bunny ears, mostly black to go with their shining black plumage, but a few with brilliant white instead.

But the biggest novelty was the conure - a Red-masked Parakeet (like the ones nesting in Berkeley and San Francisco, but never spotted on the 4th-Wednesday walk before) flew past us in the fenced garden. It might have been an escapee rather than a feral bird, though, as it was all alone - and as I was waiting for the light at Perkins and Grand, it - or another just like it - flew past me and up Perkins into the residential area.

On the lake, the summer exodus has begun. There are still lots of scaup (black head, white wings, gray back), and the Tufted Duck (all black except for white wings; black ponytail) and the Ring-necked Duck (black head and back, gray wings, white racing stripe, bright white ring around his . . . bill) were still with the scavenger flock by the nature center. But the Canvasbacks (red head, black chest, white back) were all gone, and we saw just one Common Goldeneye (a female, brown and swimming low in the water, as though sneaking along). A lone female Common Merganser (gray back, reddish head, white throat) was patrolling around the islands - perhaps one of three that spent the winter here, despite their species' usual preference for fresh water instead of our salt.

Meanwhile, the stiff-tailed Ruddy Duck drakes were putting on their party clothes (brilliant russet back, black and white head, blue bill) preparatory to taking off, and so were the Eared Grebes and Horned Grebes (the little red-eyed powder puffs, looking like jewelers' work this time of year, with fans or bands of gold beside their eyes). Two Snowy Egrets were sitting on one of the islands, where up till 2005 we'd have had 40 or 50 of them getting ready to nest. No idea why they left, but I wish they'd come back. See www.pbase.com/image/122970766 for a glimpse of what we're missing.

Life was jumping in Lakeside Park, too - our Black Phoebe was back in her nest on the Parks Dept. garage and flycatching from the roof above it, and we found a pair of Bushtits (flying mice) building a nest in the garden. The pair of Coopers' Hawks came swooping overhead. And all told, we saw 47 species of wild birds, on this loveliest of all lovely days at the lake....

RECENT SCENES FROM LAKE MERRITT:



Simone and John, our stalwart volunteers who keep the 12th Street beach clean.



This edition of "Tidings" was published entirely with private funding donated to the Lake Merritt Institute. To contribute to the Institute, contact us at 510-238-2290 or 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610.