

The Lake Merritt Institute

And CENTER FOR URBAN RUNOFF AND WATERSHED RESEARCH

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OF MATTERS GEESE: A total of 424 geese were counted on May 17th and 713 on May 24th. These numbers fit the 2002 – 2007 curve extremely well and indicate that goose numbers at the Lake and Park are well on their way to the summer peak of about 2,000 birds. However, the gosling count was only 5, far below what was expected and much later in the season than in past years.



Note loose feather indicating start of the molting season

New offspring of herons is also reportedly down this year (see article below) leading many to wonder “what is going on?” Speculation as to cause ranges from:

- The extremely dry January and March this year (which may have led to insubstantial forage for egg production?) to
- The lack of upwelling offshore and the global-wide change of seasons related to global warming (leading to less primary/secondary production in the Lake?) to
- Trimming of bushes in the park (which reduced available nesting sites?) to
- The fact that no duckweed washed down from the golf course this year (reducing nutrient input and perhaps the result of herbicide use at the golf course - which then reduced plankton and algal production at the Lake).

A Goose Management Public Meeting: Sometime in July, the City will host a public meeting to obtain comments on a draft goose management plan for Lake Merritt. Keep an eye on the City website for details regarding time & location. The draft plan, prepared by the consultant company Jones & Stokes for the City, presents a variety of methods to reduce problems caused by the high summer goose population. Some recommendations will no doubt be controversial, so come on out and contribute your comments.

NEIGHBORHOOD PUBLIC RADIO: Using short range, legal, FM transmitters, local radio artists have created a radio tour around Lake Merritt featuring bird calls and other natural sounds. To hear the sounds, tune in to 87.9 FM. To host a temporary transmitter, call 593-8271.

INSTITUTE CONTRACT ENDS – PROPOSAL REQUIRED AGAIN: For the first eight years that the Institute worked at Lake Merritt, we were granted city funds without a competitive bidding process. As a one-of-a-kind, non profit organization dedicated only to improving Lake Merritt, our organization was supported in much the same manner as the Oakland Zoo, Museum, Fairyland and other charitable organizations whose services to the city are considered specialized and unique. For such organizations, it has been considered that the city is best served by cooperative agreements that allow these institutions to focus on their specific mission, and not be subject to the continual change, profit motive, administrative oversight and similar practices that results when management is subject to be replaced with the next contractor. Our work (most of it trash collection from the water) and dedication to Lake Merritt were not considered to be common services or commodities that could be fulfilled by a variety of consultants.

But politics change and in 2005 the work done by the Lake Merritt Institute was put out to bid. Only two bids were received; one by the Institute and one by a firm without an office in Oakland, which was rejected. Why were there no other bids? The reasons reside in the variety of work that we do, and how we do it. Unlike a vendor who sells widgets at the lowest price, the Institute is a community based organization that promotes volunteerism to improve Lake Merritt. By inspiring neighbors who love the Lake, we leverage city funds to include the free labor of many people. Another reason that profit based companies have not bid is that picking up trash from the water is dirty, specialized work; and it does not pay well, and our other tasks are very specialized and diverse, such as maintenance of the aeration fountains, serving on the city's water quality committee, and talking to school, business and civic groups.

2007 – 2009: An extension to allow us to continue work during June is being evaluated, and our proposal to continue work for two more years will be before Council in June. Funding for the contract has been found and is available. So, if all of the city requirements for contracting and certification are met, an acceptable scope of work negotiated, council approval obtained and contracting insurance requirements are fulfilled, the Institute will be continuing our work at the Lake. Such procedures can often take several months, and we should know by mid-late summer.

NEW NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Assuming the Institute proposal to continue our work at Lake Merritt is approved by the City in its present form, all future newsletter activities will be sub-contracted to the public relations arm of PMC (Pacific Municipal Consultants). This arrangement has been established to facilitate the city requirement that any and all publicity documents will be pre-approved by the City of Oakland staff prior to production, distribution and release to the public. Regarding the newsletter specifically, the consultant and the City of Oakland staff will mutually agree on the style and format of the newsletter prior to the start of the contract. This language also applies to the website, bulletin board materials, elementary school programs and any other materials.



The St. Paul's School Sixth Grade.

They clean the Lake every week.

Each student will receive a color photograph of their class as a memento of their efforts.



Algae season arrives late and slow: Our two kinds of spring algae finally appeared in the Lake in late May.

As shown here, most of it is underwater (darker green) where it provides valuable forage and habitat for aquatic life.



Young fish in algae: And a magic column of food and shelter grew in the empty water.

MONTHLY BIRD REPORT – By Correspondent Hilary Powers:

Heat O May

High summer a month early this month, and all the winter migrants long gone. The cormorant rookery is still in full swing on the islands, although somewhat reduced from years past - probably because the trees are getting thinned out and there aren't so many desirable residences out there. All the Double-Crested Cormorants are back to their snaky-headed normal plumage, without the feathery bunny ears that earn them their name for about two months a year. They have nestlings in most nests, though some of the oldest youngsters have fledged - I saw one fly past that was so pale a bronze as to be almost white, clearly this year's bird.

The heron population continues drastically low; we saw only one Great Egret and a handful of Snowy Egrets, instead of the fifty to a hundred that should have been dancing and nesting on the islands like a cloud of white flowers. No Great Blue Herons at all. The Black-Crowned Night Herons aren't having a good year, either - almost as many of the gray and black adults as usual were giving us the beady red eyeball, but I saw only two brown youngsters.

Across Bellevue in the woods, where we quickly went to get out of the sun, we saw lots and lots of robins - some feeding their speckled fledglings - and lots of crows, too. And Canada Geese, of course, some already getting a head start on the molt. By next month it will probably look like half the geese in Northern California are in Lakeside Park. Note: These are NOT resident birds and not born here - our local geese also had a grim bad year this year, with only one nestling seen by the lake - and they're not coming for the bread people feed them, either. They fly here to molt, attracted by grass to eat in safety for the month or two it takes them to drop their flight feathers and grow a new set, then they leave.

We saw only 22 different kinds of birds, but one was a Western Wood-Pewee, a gray flycatcher we'd never seen before on a 4th-Wednesday walk. So hot as it was and puzzling as it was for the weird (lack of) behavior of the herons and egrets, it was still a good day at the Lake....

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