

# The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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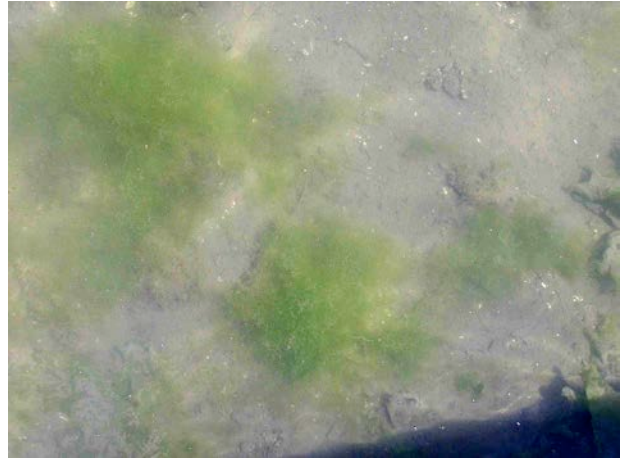
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## **SPRING ▶ SUMMER = ALGAE ▶ GEESE**

As the seasons change, so does Lake Merritt. Just as spring grows green, hatches babies and accelerates life on land, so it does in the aquatic environment. You see it first as small clumps of fuzzy green in the shallows. As the water warms, the green spreads, moving into deeper areas and becomes visible on the surface as light colored strands which become bleached by the sun and turn beige, or white. But as the monthly tide cycle continues, areas that were shallow become dry, stranding algae as a sometimes less than fragrant bouquet along the shoreline path. Eventually, if not removed by George's big harvester boat, it can spread to include the entire shallow shoreline, twenty feet out from the path to waters too deep for it to grow.

It is part of the annual cycle of seasons and many life forms are glad of it. What was once a barren column of water becomes a tower of food, shelter and shade. Around it are plankton, both plant and animal, along with schools of tiny fish, soon to be larger for it is a season of abundance. Scoop your net down there and come up with transparent shrimp, worms, isopods and green pipe fish (relatives of the sea horse).

Some of it doesn't look too good. Black mats of micro-organisms grow on the nutrient laden bottom, warmed by sunlight which, now high overhead, penetrates ever deeper and lasts longer until the summer solstice. Bouyed by oxygen produced from photosynthesis, chunks of the mat break off and float to the surface, there to be reviled as evil and reported to authorities as "what is it?"



*Pieces of bottom growth that break off and float to the surface are not pollution.*

*This is a natural occurrence; it happens every spring.*

*It is not oil. Touching it will cause it to disintegrate.*

Geese Arrive: But as spring ends and the algae wanes or succumbs to the harvester, a new challenge flies in. Starting about Memorial Day and peaking about Independence Day, geese from all over Bay Area converge on little old Lake Merritt. Their numbers climb from a few hundred to almost 2,000 and they come here to

molt, shedding wing feathers all over the lawn (along with their droppings). This year the City has ordered better equipment in an attempt to remove unwanted fecal material from the lawns, but a shortage of operators will limit how often it can be used. Disintegration by irrigation may be the best option.

In between the time of the algae and a flourish of geese, cormorants raise their young on the islands, trees are full of birds, and boats ply the waters. Life is blossoming at Lake Merritt; come on down to the bottom of the watershed and be part of it.



*Cormorant nests: Photo by Lee Aurich*

### **STOP DUMPING FOOD**

On an almost weekly basis, someone has been dumping large quantities of raw food at the end of the driveway between the Chalet and Cameron Stanford house. A woman drives up in the morning and unloads things such as red peppers, salad greens and all kinds of other food that belongs in the garbage, not on the lawn by the Lake. Hint to whoever is doing it. Birds don't eat red peppers.

### **CATCH OF THE DAY**

You undoubtedly heard about the jewelry, silver and watches found by St. Paul's 6<sup>th</sup> grade volunteers. Those items have apparently been turned over to someone the police believe to be the owner. But do you know what else we have found amidst the trash in the last few months? Here is a sample list:

- A blood pressure cuff and meter
- Half of a big, yellow parking boot
- Several blankets
- Too many turtles (which die if left in our salt water lake)
- Several scarves
- Three sleeping bags
- A glass pipe
- A lamp
- A Warriors jersey
- A jacket
- A tent

You never know what you are going to find when you clean Lake Merritt.

## **BIRD COLUMN**

Not-Quite-Summer at the Lake

The May 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk encountered a few notable holdouts from the winter migrants - one Greater Scaup drake, very natty with bright white wings, gray back, and shiny green head, one Pied-billed Grebe - chunky and squat and hanging out with the scaup for lack of anyone more familiar - and one white-billed black American Coot.

The trees on the islands were full of nesting Double-crested Cormorants, many with quite large youngsters in their nests, and the trees themselves were suffering. (The cormorants prefer dead trees to live ones - the nest sites on leafy branches are always the last to be taken - and now that so many of the old dead trees have fallen, the birds have moved into the live ones in force... where their presence in such numbers is, ah, improving conditions from their point of view.) Meanwhile, on the ground, the Canada Geese seem to be having a bumper year. We saw five different families with youngsters of various sizes stumping along - many more than in recent years.

Hank-the-rescue-White Pelican had no company of his own kind, but we saw two very young Brown Pelicans (or possibly one, twice) on or near the islands. (You can tell the age by the color of the head; young birds are brown as mice, while the adults have white heads.)

A flock of burglar-masked Cedar Waxwings was working the fruiting trees in the park, and we saw four Oak Titmice (all gray with little crests on their heads) in the trees outside Children's Fairyland. So although the species count was way down - only 28 different kinds of birds - there was plenty to see, and all in all it was a good day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day (and few are so bright and clear and pleasant as this one)!

## **BACK THE BAG BAN**

As any of you who clean the Lake with us know, discarded plastic bags are one of the main items that we continually remove from the shoreline. Not a day goes by when dozens of these habitat destroying, bottom covering, unwanted in the water, symbols of waste are not part of our bags of trash. But now, there is hope.

According to the San Francisco Chronicle, Council members at one of the largest cities in the world recently voted 13-1 to ban single use plastic bags later this year after an environmental impact report is completed and an ordinance is adopted. L.A. joins a legion of other cities and nations that have also banned these nefarious and unnecessary components of litter.

As you may recall, Oakland's council members also voted to limit plastic bag use, but were forced to back off when the bag industry threatened to sue and force the City to complete an expensive environmental impact report. But as more and more environmental reports document the damage and legal precedent grows, the tide is turning (and hopefully it will not include so many plastic bags).



A few years ago the City of Oakland banned the use of Styrofoam containers for use in taking out food from restaurants and that was a big success (we remove far fewer of these cups and containers from the Lake now). The City's target reduction of trash in storm water runoff includes an 8% component from a single use carryout bag policy and this should be a similar success story. Those that clean the Lake (and everywhere else) look forward to it.

## CLIMATE CORNER

As justification for their recent billboards in Chicago which matched photos of unabomber Ted Kaczynski with the statement "I still believe in global warming. Do You?" the Heartland Institute issued a statement as follows:



"The people who still believe in man-made global warming are mostly on the radical fringe of society. This is why the most prominent advocates of global warming aren't scientists. They are murderers, tyrants, and madmen."

That anyone would pay for such a billboard is hard to believe. Such actions are insults to those who have, and are, losing their homes and livelihoods to climate change related drought, tornadoes, floods, sea level rise, wildfires, famine and war. Within 24 hours, the billboards were taken down and the ad campaign canceled.

## FOUND

If you are missing a Volkswagen hood ornament with a dolls head tied onto it using a green scarf, we have it. This was recently photographed on a car, but apparently the doll didn't like it, dropped off and jumped into the Lake.

## RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE



*Mallard ducklings: Probably only a few days old.*



*Litterbugs: STOP IT! There are ducklings at play here.*

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