

The Lake Merritt Institute

LAKE TRASH REMOVAL, FOUNTAINS, EDUCATION, LAKE MANAGEMENT EXPERTISE

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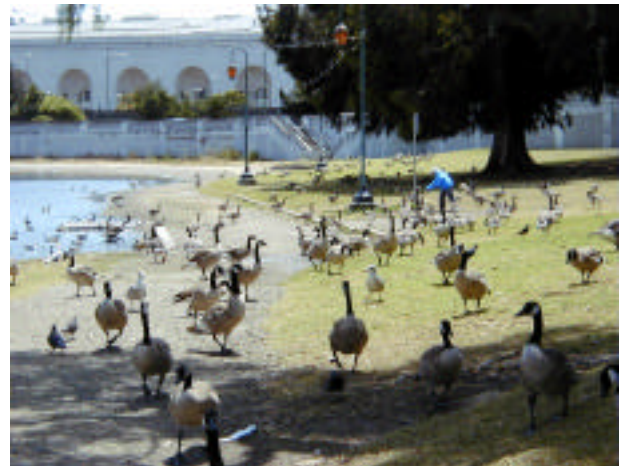
ISSUE VII

GEESE, GEESE, AND MORE GEESE: For the last two years the Institute has counted geese at Lake Merritt in an effort to document how many birds use the park and why their numbers increase in the summer. Last summer and since early April of this year, we have conducted weekly counts, and so far the numbers from 2003 are very similar to those of last year.

During most of the year (fall, winter and spring) there are about 200 – 400 geese in the park. Although their numbers increase somewhat in April and May as goslings hatch, these new arrivals account for only about 75 – 150 birds. Then, in June, their numbers skyrocket to more than 1500 birds. Why? It's the molt. You can tell by the feathers. Yes we have feathers, many thousands of them. If you want a feather, please come to Lake Merritt and take some. Molting birds come to Lake Merritt from elsewhere to molt, and they come in droves.



On June 14, 2002, we counted 1,375 geese. This year, we counted 1,720 on June 11 and 1,777 on June 18.

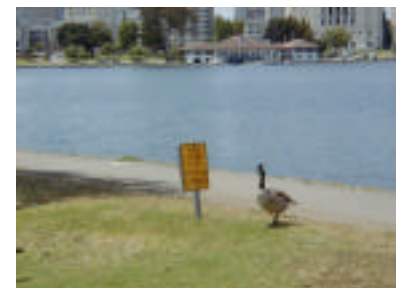


Last year goose numbers peaked at 1,896 on July 2nd. How many will we have this year?

It wasn't always this way; a few decades ago there were hardly any geese at the Lake. They may have been here first, but these large summer numbers are apparently a new phenomenon. As described in Managing Canada Geese in Urban Environments – A Technical Guide (available in our library) large increases in goose numbers are happening across the United States and elsewhere. They have undergone a phenomenal population increase from only a few thousand in 1965 (Hanson, 1965) to an estimated 1.1 million in 1996 (Wood et al. 1996) in the central United States alone.

A goose contemplates a no littering sign.

One goose defecates 10,000,000 fecal coliform bacteria per day and large flocks can cause elevated fecal coliform densities in the water column (Applied and Environmental Microbiology: 37:1, 14-20).



Although geese are the signature bird of our wildlife refuge, too many of a good thing is not good. One goose; wow, that's great. Ten geese; a nice flock. 50 geese; good. 100 geese; OK. 300 geese; that's a lot of geese. 500 geese; where are all these geese coming from? 1,000 geese; look at all these geese feces! 2,000 geese; ? Obviously each of us has different reactions to these numbers, but when birds reach the densities we are now seeing, the potential for diseases such as avian cholera, schistosomes, salmonella and avian influenza increases dramatically. If one of these hits, there is the potential for massive die-offs, which is not good for the birds.

A Plan? It is also not good for people who want to have a picnic or let their babies loose on the grass. The Master Plan recognized this by including a recommendation to create a Goose Management Plan which would achieve a consensus on what to do about too many geese. Recent measure DD spending plans include implementation of such a plan, but there is a question regarding if this capital improvement bond can be used to fund such studies. But before it can be implemented, the plan must be created, which is not now happening.

Elsewhere: Other lakes, such as Lake Elizabeth in Fremont, have implemented long term goose management including restrictions on feeding, temporary fencing, reducing the number of young hatched each year (which requires a federal permit) and the use of a professional company called Goosebusters, which humanely chases them away from designated areas. Over the years these methods have worked. Even during the molting season, goose numbers are at acceptable levels and people can use picnic areas without competition.



Left: A spotted Turbot (a type of flatfish) was found in the Lake in June.

Right: Trash in a homeless nest near Fairyland.



CITY PLANS TO REMOVE WATER QUALITY MONITORS: Last year in May, Oakland contracted with a consulting firm to install and maintain two water quality monitors in Lake Merritt. The installation was part of the City's plan to improve oxygen levels and get the Lake removed from EPA's list of impaired water bodies. If unsuccessful in this effort, TMDLs (regulatory mandates) are likely to be issued, as has been done in southern California.

This year, the devices are to be removed and put in storage, a victim of budget inadequacies. Although the Institute has offered to maintain them for free (a clause in our contract states the Institute will "provide technical assistance on water quality") we have not been given approval and plans are still to put them in storage at the end of June. We are appealing the decision.

"A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF LAKE MERRITT" NOW ON THE WEBSITE: First published last fall as a hard copy, this 34 page document with 37 photographs, two tables and three charts can now be viewed and printed from our website www.lakemerrittinstitute.org as a .pdf file. Just open it with Adobe Acrobat Reader, which you can download for free from www.adobe.com. Chronicling the changes at Lake Merritt through four seasons, this report contains little known information about our downtown urban estuary and its inhabitants. It may surprise you.

To receive this newsletter via Email rather than as a paper copy contact lmi@netwiz.net.

The Lake Merritt Institute is sponsored and supported by the Oakland Public Works Agency