

# The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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**OAKLAND RECEIVES FEDERAL STIMULUS MONEY:** Congratulations to the City for receipt of over \$4.7 million in Federal Stimulus Funding for Stormwater Quality, rainwater harvesting and other projects. Included in the largesse will be over 400 curb screen inlet inserts (to be installed at trash hotspots where there is no risk of flooding); two CDS type filters (one described below); an educational billboard near the Coliseum; a new hydro-vacuum truck and replacement storm water booms. Wow! Kudos to staff who labored on the proposals and to the Obama administration folks who provided the funds. Improving the environment and providing jobs: What could be better?

## FLOODING AT THE NATURE CENTER:

When it rains hard (as in strong El Nino years) and the sycamore tree leaves all drop down at once, the storm drain inlet at Perkins and Bellevue clogs up. Vertical bars were installed years ago to keep leaves (and trash) from washing into the Lake, but with too many leaves, they work too well. Water overflows the curb, heads down along the slope and into the Rotary Center building, which is not where it should be. Potential solutions: 1) Remove the vertical grate. 2) Make the inlet a 10 foot long trough, not just a two foot opening.



**LAKE CRITTERS** (Your Monthly, Non-Reality, Lake Status Report): Crabby the Crab is a bad critter. He sits around all day by storm drain outfalls and waits for urban runoff pollution he knows will flow down into the Lake. You know, car wash soap, house paint, leaking motor oil, lawn fertilizer, that kind of stuff. When rains wash it in, he bathes in the stuff; and it shows. Crabby has seven legs instead of the usual six, he glows green at night and his shell looks like it was made by an oil company.

But the Oakland City staff have it in for him. They are secretly (who else knows about it?) installing storm drain filters to keep water pollution out of the Lake! Did you know that? A small, curb inlet filter, so we have heard, is already by Whole Foods on 27th Street, catching whatever washes in from the nearby street. Other filters have been rumored to be nearby.

A much larger, continuous deflection separation type filter will soon be installed by the *Rotary Nature Center* in Lakeside Park. That one will be below the street at the corner of Perkins & Bellevue Avenue, built in a hole about 15 – 20 feet deep so it can catch a lot of stuff. If you look closely, you can even see paint on the pavement where it will soon be.

Poor Crabby. Soon he will have to crawl elsewhere to find his pollution. Perhaps he will go over to outfall # 7, the big tunnel that drains from what used to be Pleasant Valley and Bushy Dell creeks. These drains come from Piedmont, and they don't have any storm drain filters (but they are talking about it). If you see Crabby there, chase him away!

Coming Soon: *Rogue* Critters! You know, rogue, as in rogue countries and Sarah Palin.

**CLIMATE CORNER** (Being a Discussion of Global Warming): Many of us are feeling guilty, for it is our generation that is leaving a legacy of climate de-stabilization to the next generation, their children, and (since carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for about 100 years) for their children's children. Our parents and their parents started the process, because it was their emissions from the Industrial revolution onward that have caused the climate changes that we are seeing today. And it is our present day emissions that will cause the increasingly larger changes now on the horizon.



So to decrease the guilt, we offer here a column of information that may help to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. This month: Two books that you really should read:

Fixing Climate: What Past Climate Changes Reveal About the Current Threat.  
W.S. Broecker & R. Kunzig. 2008.

This marvelous book aptly describes the Climate Beast that we have awakened. Broecker has been studying climate for decades and his knowledge is vast. Well written and timely.

State of the World 2009: Into a Warming World.  
World Watch Institute. 2009.

This upbeat status report explains how we got into this mess, provides details from around the world and offers somewhat utopian suggestions on how to solve the problem. Can we avoid dangerous climate change without utopia? Read and decide.

**THE SLOW SEASON:** Autumn is a transitional season at Lake Merritt and in early October, the page has not yet turned. A few leaves float on the surface, waiting for the thousands that will soon join them. Trash is minimal, but lurks upstream in the watershed. Most of the geese are gone, cormorants are arriving and the sculpins, gobies and shrimp will be leaving the soon to be cold shallow waters. Algae grows half heartedly in the waning daylight. Summer plankton blooms are a memory.



*Autumn*

*The slow season*

**FALLING INTO ACTION AT LAKE MERRITT:** The September 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk saw some Ruddy Ducks (dull brown at this season, with tails sticking up like handles) - the first of the winter's migrants - plus a pair of Common Mergansers (rusty heads, gray bodies, long sharp pink bills) fishing near one of the islands. Mergansers are rare at the lake at any season and tend to stay far from shore, so it was a treat to see these so close! A party of American White Pelicans was fishing along the far side of the lake from the boathouse, and some Brown Pelicans sat and preened their feathers on the deck of the new restaurant.

We also saw a first-of-season Western Grebe (long, snaky white neck, black head, sharp heavy beak) and four kinds of herons: Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Egret, and Snowy Egret. (The first two live up to their names; the second two are both white, but the Great is bigger and has a yellow beak and black feet, while the Snowy has a black beak and yellow feet.) A Belted Kingfisher was taking advantage of the departure of most of the Double-crested Cormorants to sit in one of their bare trees, but we couldn't tell if it was our usual female visitor or not as it kept its back turned and we couldn't see if there was an orange cummerbund to go with the dark blue chest band or not.



*Great Egret (left). Snowy Egret (right).*

Over in the community garden, the monkey puzzle tree and the pine next to it were full of little birds, mostly hiding - but we saw a pair of Western Tanagers (bright yellow, with smart black-and-white wings) and a Warbling Vireo (olive green above, creamy gold below, big bright eye with segments of a pale ring above and below it). A Bewick's Wren was buzzing (literally; it sounds like a piece of machinery) around in there, too.

All told, 35 species that we were sure of, and a few others that didn't sit still long enough to recognize. A good day as always at Lake Merritt - but probably not as good a day as we'll have on October 28 at the next walk. (Meet at 9:30 at the spherical cage if you'd like to join us!)

—Hilary Powers

### **PARKING IS SUCH ~~SWEET~~ SORROW:**



**KILLING THE GOOSE THAT LAYS THE GOLDEN EGG?** As shown above, parking fees at Lakeside Park will now be levied on weekdays, and increased on weekends. We do not yet know if volunteers who give their time without charge will be charged for parking. Also impacted will be lawn bowlers, rowing clubs, Nature Center users, Fairyland patrons, Jr. Center students and those who attend events at the Garden Center and Boathouse. Parks are for people, but if you drive here, you will pay.

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