

# The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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## LAKE MERRITT FOUNTAINS NEED YOU !!!

Aeration fountain maintenance, for which the Institute is responsible, is expensive. Stainless steel motors designed for salt water, parts (capacitors, circuit breakers, overload switches, underwater cables, timers, lights, floats, intake screens, anchors, motor leads and connectors) as well as labor for a professional electrician who can drive the boat and operate the crane are all very costly.

These costs sometimes limit our efforts to keep the fountains running, the waters mixing and the wildlife happy.

But... you can help. Please send your donation to:

Fountain Fund  
c/o The Lake Merritt Institute  
568 Bellevue Avenue  
Oakland, CA 94610



We have recently experienced three motor failures, but working together, we can minimize the down time for repairs and maintenance, and keep the waters dancing. Thank you.

## BIRD COLUMN: Fall Pause:

The October 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk sighted a real rarity: Dr. Dick Bailey, never before seen in that company, joined the stroll through the woods. Otherwise, we saw only 38 species of birds - less than expected for the season - but some goodly numbers. Three Downy Woodpeckers (the little guys with the white patch between the shoulders) chased each other around a tree near the outside corner of the garden, and clouds of Yellow-Rumped Warblers (a.k.a. Butter-



Butts) filled several of the trees, along with several Anna's Hummingbirds (the ones we have here all year), looking for who-knows-what among the branches.



*All eyes look up in the Garden Center*



*A green heron poses by the Nature Center*

In the lake, a Green Heron (actually gray and rust-colored and normally a shy, hiding sort of bird) sat out on the branch that sticks out of the water near the playground and let us get good long looks - and a second one flew by croaking loudly. Hank-the-rescue-Pelican had one white friend left, which took off and flew around and around overhead, giving us beautiful views of those huge, black-tipped wings. Several Brown Pelicans perched or cruised overhead, and one started to dive - then sheered off fishless. A bunch of crows chased a young Red-tailed Hawk into one of the island trees, then flew off and left the hawk to eye us as we eyed it.

The water was full of American Coots (black with white beaks) and Ruddy Ducks (all brown at this season, except that the males have bright white cheeks), with a few Pied-billed Grebes (the stocky ones with the triangular heads) mixed in. None of the other winter migrants were here yet, except for one Canvasback drake with his copper head tucked under one white wing and one Western Grebe in long-necked splendor by the Embarcadero fountain.

A few Double-crested Cormorants were left near the nests in the trees, and more on the floats out in the lake, along with the usual population of gulls and pigeons. And each and every one was more beautiful than all the others on this lovely, crystalline fall day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day....

### **THE GLEN ECHO WATERSHED WALK**

Susan Porter loves watersheds. She also teaches 6<sup>th</sup> grade at St. Paul's School where she has won an award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for her watershed program. The following is summarized from her Glen Echo Creek Watershed Walk, in which students follow the creek down from the hills to Lake Merritt.

Four questions are asked and answered: Where is the creek? What is it's history? What problems arise as a city grows up around the creek? Who cares? Starting by the Safeway parking lot at Broadway and Pleasant Valley Road, the students learn that the quarry pond there is used to irrigate the golf course upstream. This means that fertilizers from the greens end up in the pond, causing large amounts of duckweed to grow. When rains fill the pond, it overflows into Glen Echo Creek, on it's way down to Lake Merritt.

Looking back at the cemetery they learn that Samuel Merritt himself is buried there, along with Henry J. Kaiser, Julia Morgan and many other famous Oaklanders. Traveling down Broadway and then along side streets, the students pick and count litter in the street. Why? Because whatever is in the gutter can be washed down into storm drains that lead directly to the creek. Where is the creek? Right underneath Broadway, which was once a little path that followed the water.



Piedmont Avenue follows another part of the creek, which joins the main stream as it meets Broadway. Students then discuss why the creeks were covered up as the city was built. Side streets named after the creek (Glen Eden, Glen, Echo) are explored, noting the low dips where the storm drain/creek passes underneath. Storm drain openings are noted at these low points and elsewhere. A day care center and playground have been built over the creek, but it sometimes rises up and floods here.

*Glen Echo Creek emerges below the freeway*

At Arroyuelo (translates to: A small stream, brook) students take a water sample and note where the water flows under a dentist's office on Linda Street. Another sample is taken at Glen Echo Creek Park and a third at Oak Glen Park. Many trees shade the creek here, both being dependent on each other. Trash counts are made again, and compared to upstream totals.

Finally, at the Veteran's building, the creek emerges from a tunnel large enough to walk through and flows into Lake Merritt. Additional water samples are taken so the students can test how the creek impacts salinity, which leads into a discussion of how the Lake stratifies into fresh and salty layers.

The Watershed Walk blends into student community service, which includes weekly trash removal at the Lake by the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. All together, it provides a fun, educational and timely lesson plan.

## **CLIMATE CORNER**

In August, 2006, an article appeared in *Science* magazine, written by A. L. Westerling et al. In that article, the authors concluded:

“We compiled a comprehensive database of large wildfires in western United States forests since 1970 and compared it with hydroclimatic and land-surface data. Here, we show that large wildfire activity increased suddenly and markedly in the mid-1980s, with higher large-wildfire frequency, longer wildfire durations, and longer wildfire seasons. The greatest increases occurred in mid-elevation, Northern Rockies forests, where land-use histories have relatively little effect on fire risks and are strongly associated with increased spring and summer temperatures and an earlier spring snowmelt.”

Essentially, wildfires in the Western United States have increased 4-fold in a 30 year span between about 1970 and 2000, which is one more example of the early impacts of climate change. However, in response, a Canadian Tar Sands Development is proposed to expand 5-fold (to an area the size of Florida); new coal fired power plants with a life span of about 60 years are being built; mountain-top removal of coal continues; and oil/gas extraction in the Arctic, offshore and on our public lands is expanding. Increased wildfires it seems, are not a reason to control climate change. How much damage will it take to overcome our addiction to fossil fuels?



### **RECENTLY REMOVED FROM THE LAKE**

The following items were found during our regular Tuesday clean up events:

A mop, a bed (with attached mattress – very heavy), three tree logs, a pair of pants, numerous and various balls, a purple wig, ladies underwear, a lamp and a book.

If that sounds like fun, join us. The “regulars” meet at 10:30 every Tuesday on the second floor of the Boating Center, 568 Bellevue Avenue, in Lakeside Park. Tell the parking lot attendant that you are volunteering with the Institute to clean up Lake Merritt.

### **WEBSITE UPDATED**

Recent newsletters are now accessible on our website, but if you want the latest news when it is new, become a member, get your timely copy and support your Institute, which supports your Lake.

### **RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE**



*Sixth grade students from St. Paul's School clean Lake Merritt every Thursday during the school year.*



*Construction has kept trash off of the beach and limited our ability to clean at 18<sup>th</sup> Street.*

*This edition of “Tidings” was published entirely with private funding donated to the Lake Merritt Institute. To contribute to the Institute, use our website or send a check to 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610.*