

# The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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**LAKE CRITTERS:** Note; this story is true, not a fantasy.

Sean the sculpin (a type of small, bottom dwelling fish) was missing. And so were his cousins, brothers, sisters and other relatives. Much worse, reports were coming in through the plankton network that many other types of fish had also vanished. Something is going on. Then, the tubeworms reported seeing a dangerous sight. *At least 15 fish traps were spotted in the shallow waters of our tidal estuary.* Although "they" claim to have a permit, no tags with a permit number were seen on the traps. And, gondoliers reported seeing fishermen carrying off aerated buckets of fish, every night. Where were they going? To the bait industry. At a dollar or two per fish, it is lucrative.



But help may be on the way. Reports have been made to the state Department of Fish & Game CALTIP program which takes anonymous reports of poaching. The number to call is 888-334-2258. In addition, personal contacts with the law enforcement division of DFG have been activated and the local warden has been notified. You can help too. If you see fish traps, commercial or illegal fishing activity, record pertinent information (license plates, photos, location, date, time, etc.) and call the CALTIP number. The critters (and the fish eating birds that rely on this food source for survival) will be grateful.

**A SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR THE CITY:** It is the holiday season and you are searching for a parking space to attend a party at the Lake Chalet, or to take in the Christmas Revels. But there are no parking spaces, and valet parking at \$5.50 a car is FULL, as it typically is on most nights.



How can the city solve your parking problem, increase business at the Chalet, encourage the small gondola business and earn income at the same time? The answer resides in the parking lot at the Lakeside Park Boating Center. Empty on most nights, it is a short boat ride from the Chalet and Scottish Rite Temple. All that is needed is a water taxi to carry folks across the water and a parking/boat fee to use the existing facilities.

We are not economists, but let's say that the parking/boat trip fee is \$5.00 (less than the often full valet parking). The City is already charging \$5 on weekends/holidays and \$2 for two hours to park in Lakeside Park so this is not a stretch and it gets you to dinner on time after a delightful cruise on the sparkling waters. Half of the fee could go to the city and half to Gondola Servizio to operate and maintain the boat. Gondola Servizio already has boatmen on duty most nights and this could be worked into their existing contract with the City. If 150 people a week used the service, it would bring in \$375 a week (\$19,500 a year) to the City. Gondoliers could collect the fee, thus eliminating the need for a city employee to man the toll booth. In two years, the boat might pay for itself.

All that is needed is the water taxi and one is available in Venice. It is a historical Venetian vessel called a "Burchiello" and was used as a bus/ferry to move groups of people from one part of the city to the other. It was built by Franco Crea Vianello for the gondoliers at the Santa Lucia gondola service and used for mainly parades. It seats 15 people and even has a roof over it to protect folks from the sun. For \$35,000 (shipping included) it could be here at Lake Merritt. Designed to be green, it is powered by two rowers (no motors = less maintenance and less greenhouse gas). The boat itself would be a tourist attraction as well as an income generator. Hmmm, is there any federal stimulus money available for that?



### **CLIMATE CORNER (dedicated to keeping sea level below Lake Merritt):**



Two New Books You Should Read: On December 8<sup>th</sup>, Jim Hansen (the grandfather of climate change information) will release his new book “Storms of My Grandchildren.” Dr. Hansen is a foremost authority on what is actually happening to our climate, and if you know his work, you will want to read this. Also available is Nobel prize winner / Vice President Al Gore’s new book “Our Choice” which describes solutions to our planet wide crisis. Both are just in time for the holidays.

A Climate Change Exhibit at Chabot? Bill Nye the Science guy is involved and you can be too. As part of their expanding mission, Oakland’s premier space museum is developing a climate change (climate destabilization) exhibit to let people know what is really going on, why, and what they can do about it. As with many things that increase our knowledge, such exhibits are expensive. If you can contribute to its development, contact the folks at Chabot.

*A Really Inconvenient Truth:* [www.climateplace.org](http://www.climateplace.org). Go here to see Dan Miller explain why “Climate change will be much worse, much sooner than most people think.” With graphic images, logic and current information, Mr. Miller lets us know that our planet is now changing faster, in some ways much faster, than the United Nations or computer predictions. For example, glaciers that feed rivers upon which one quarter of the world’s population depend for irrigation will be irreversibly changed (mostly gone) by 2050, or sooner. Want more details? Check it out.

While some engineers and coal company lobbyists mollify us with false information, fear of economic ruin and unproven technology, it is increasingly clear that only wealthy nations will be able to temporarily avoid some of the impacts of climate change with sea walls, massive water supply projects, air conditioning etc. Third world nations (most of the earth’s population) will be unable to adapt to declining food production, rising sea level, expanding sub-tropics and forest destruction by fire and insects. So please, work locally, but think globally. Because when people have a choice between starvation and war, they often choose war.

*Methane, a potent greenhouse gas, is being released in the arctic due to global warming. As more is released, it causes more warming, which releases more gas. This feedback loop is now exaggerating climate destabilization.*



**Falling Toward Winter:** The regular seasonal visitors were almost all out in force for November's 4th-Wednesday bird walk - only the Barrow's Goldeneyes (brilliant black-and-white ducks with a crescent moon on each cheek) were missing, most likely because they moved up to the 12th Street Bridge or Laney College early this year. The Common Goldeneyes (same, with a full moon on each cheek and more white on the back) were still by the Nature Center, along with both kinds of scaup (gray backs, white wings, black heads; the difference between Greater and Lesser Scaup only a scaup would care about), Buffleheads (also black and white, but tiny, with the whole back of the head bright white), Canvasbacks (auburn head, white back, red eye, black ski-jump beak), and Ruddy Ducks (dull brown at this time of year, with their tails sticking straight up like handles).

It was feisty out there. My favorite duck, a female Redhead (all brown, with a white band around the point of her beak), was terrorizing the flock waiting to be fed by the Nature Center. Down by the end of the island, a Western Grebe (long snaky white neck, black head) chased a female scaup (brown with a big white patch of feathers around the base of her bill) up from underwater and landed beak-first in the middle of her back. Both swam off pretending it never happened, as creatures do, but it was the most serious interspecies encounter I've seen in the lake.

This year's Belted Kingfisher - a male, all blue and white - rattled and called from the trees on the islands; we got several very good views of him, and of some adult Brown Pelicans (recognizable by their white heads and necks) that were fishing in the lake. And it was a five-heron day - more of the white Snowy and Great Egrets than I've seen in years, Black-crowned Night-Herons with their brilliant red eyes and gray and black business suits, Great Blue Herons towering over the cormorants on the floats, and two tiny Green Herons - an immature bird on the island nearest the nature center and a full adult sitting on the edge of the lake beside the path, calmly ignoring the parade of joggers and baby strollers. That last is truly amazing - Green Herons are normally the shyest of the class, hiding in the weeds and flying from even a quite distant human, but this one sat there, bright rufous neck and dull greenish back shining in the sun, for several minutes before flying casually to one of the islands. The juvenile is easy to tell apart from the young Black-crowned Night-Herons by its needle-like beak and handsome auburn-and-cream streaked breast; the night-herons are dull brown and beige, and their beaks are heavy in proportion to their heads.

A Red-tailed Hawk was sitting in one of the trees on the islands, displaying its broad brown belly-band, and an adult Cooper's Hawk flew into the big pine by the arts and crafts building at the end of the walk - neat and small, with a gray back and a peaches-and-cream breast. A fortunate few saw a Peregrine Falcon make a couple of passes over the lake, too - long, pointed wings, striped black on white underneath, with a dark head and a white upper breast - perhaps one of the pair that's been hanging out between the Kaiser Center and Alameda this year.

And that was just by the lake. We also saw White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, and Chestnut-backed Chickadees, and Bewick's Wrens, and all sorts of other darting and hopping wonders in the park and the garden on this beautiful and summery late-autumn day at Lake Merritt....

**NO CALENDARS THIS YEAR:** A shortage of funds due to expenses related to replacing the Institute truck have forced us to curtail the annual purchase of calendars for members. With 121 paid members, the cost would be well over \$400 and the money is just not there. We hope to re-institute the tradition next year.



**TAX DEDUCTION TIME:** Once again the tax man cometh. But if you want to keep him at bay, consider an end of the year deductible donation to the Lake Merritt Institute, which is a bona fide 501-C-3, non-profit, charity. Just send it in or contact Dr. Bailey for details. Save money / help Lake Merritt.

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