

THE TIDINGS



LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

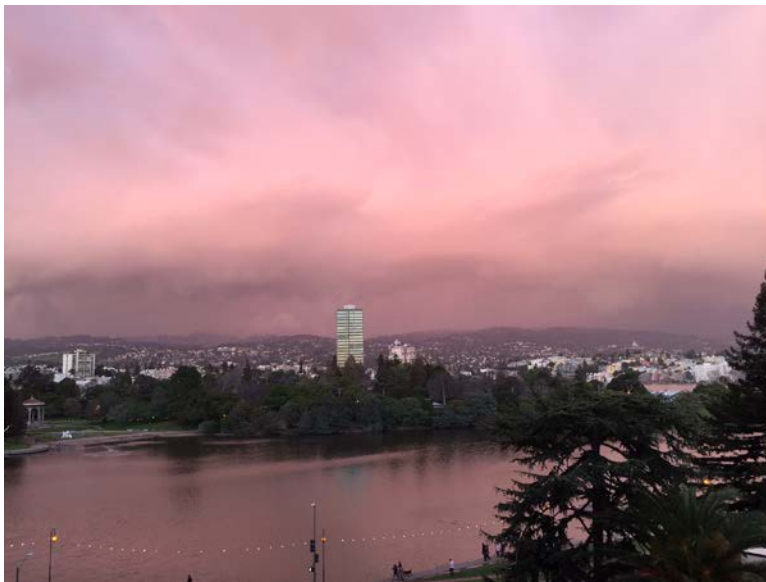
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STORMY MARCH SKIES OVER LAKE MERRITT - To the relief of Bay Area residents, following a dry February, March brought steady rain to the region. The monthly total was approximately 4.49”. Like a line-up of baseball players swinging bats, a series of off-shore low pressure areas (which in the northern hemisphere rotate counter-clockwise) produced deep pressure troughs that propelled strong winds of cold, high-density air to move northward. In the “swing” of the bats the cold, high-density air undercuts the warmer air forcing it to rise, expand, cool, condense, and release rain. Strong creek and storm sewer outflows brought the level of Lake Merritt to within about 1 foot of the top

of the lake retaining walls. Special thanks to Lee Aurich for yet another fine photo (aurich.com/photos).

SPECIAL APRIL 1ST RECIPE FOR OUR READERS – RESCUE TURTLE SOUP -

Readers often ask, what does LMI do with the many abandoned turtles our volunteers rescue from Lake Merritt? Well, something for all to keep in mind is that turtle soup can make for a marvelously tasty as well as nourishing rainy-season warmer-upper.



Recipe for “Rescue Turtle Soup”:

Sauté: one adult California Brown Turtle
(a Western Red Slider may be substituted)

Add: 4 Cups fish stock

1 Cup yellow or red onion; minced

1 Cup of brown mushrooms, thinly sliced

4 cloves of garlic, crushed

2 teaspoons salt

Slow simmer for 2 hours

Season to taste

Serves 6 – 8 LMI volunteers! 🍲

MOUNTAIN LION SIGHTING IN TRESTLE GLEN – NO KIDDING! - In early March a Trestle Glen / Crocker Highlands resident reported the following on “Nextdoor”:

“...I was in bed around 4 AM this morning when I heard a rustle in the back of the house. Next came a



squeal and a growl. This continued for about 10 minutes. My boyfriend came home from work and went to check to see what it was. It was a HUGE MOUNTAIN LION. Please everyone be careful if you are jogging early mornings or coming home late at night. I wasn't able to get a photo but the mountain lion was the size around 150-200 lbs....” . The mountain lion was spotted on the public stairway that runs from Trestle Glen and Barrows Rd. up to Holman Rd. Mountain Lion sightings in the Bay area are becoming ever more common and this is possibly the closest sighting to Lake Merritt. Perhaps the mountain lions of the East Bay will develop an appetite for Canadian Geese. 🐾

CLIMATE CORNER by Dr. Richard Bailey, - DRAINING MONEY FROM LAKE MERRITT. *(Note: The Following is in Lieu of The Climate Corner Column).*

Did you know that about 14 percent of our contract funding from the city of Oakland (about \$20,593 per year) is required to be spent on worker’s compensation insurance? This is insurance for just three employees, does not cover our volunteers, nor our board of directors, and is despite the fact that the Institute has never filed a claim in our entire existence. This is a significant increase over last year’s already high rate, and is based on a rate of 18.59% of net payroll. That means that for every one dollar in payroll, the Institute pays (with city tax money) more than 18 cents for this insurance!

Background: This insurance is required by state law, and by our contract with the city. Despite this, hardly any agency other than the State Compensation Insurance Fund (SCIF) will sell such insurance to a tiny non-profit such as the Institute. SCIF has a virtual monopoly on such policies. For most workers, the rate is a more palatable 2 -5 percent. Our rate is based on the category of Amusement Park Maintenance. There is a related category, which is 4.23 percent lower, but SCIF chose to place us in the higher category.

A Penalty: Our rate this year was increased 1.5% as a penalty for lapse of coverage last year, due to a failed change of address notice. As you recall, the Institute moved out of our office during Boating Center construction. When we moved back in, address change notices were sent out and everyone but SCIF implemented them. So the bills from SCIF went to the old address, from where they were not forwarded, and were not paid for about three months. Rather than trying to contact us, SCIF promptly canceled our insurance. Perhaps this was related to knowing they could apply a penalty. After paying the past amount due, pleas by the Institute to re-instate our old policy were rejected, leading to a seven month application process (with the help of an insurance broker; another fee, \$550) that resulted in the current penalty and billing rate.

Most of our readers prefer to read about the positive sides of Lake Merritt, but once in a while, it is important to let people know about systems such as these which drain money that could be spent on Lake Merritt. So if you are dealing with the SCIF, beware.

Special note: Dan Reicher, an internationally recognized energy policy expert who attended the Paris Climate Conference last December was part of a panel discussion on how to

implement Piedmont's "Climate Action Plan". Also speaking was the City of Oakland's sustainability Program Manager Daniel Hamilton and Piedmont Mayor Margaret Fujioka. Oakland's Mayor Libby Schaff and Hamilton both attended the Paris Conference as well. The Paris Conference marked a significant achievement in achieving climate goals by turning the focus to the actions of local and regional communities. The discussion was held on Monday, March 28, at 7:00 PM, at the Piedmont Community Hall, 711 Highland Ave.

SAN FRANCISCO BAY DURING THE AGE OF MEGAFUNA - In the March issue of "The Tidings" it was reported that the San Francisco Bay that we all know is relatively young at about 10,000 years of age. Doris Sloan, PhD. in Geology, and professor at UCB, relays in her book, "Geology of the San Francisco Bay Region", that about 120,000 years ago during the last interglacial period the bay water level was about 20' higher than now, and volume much larger. Fossil organisms found in deep mud show that the bay waters were much saltier, colder, and deeper.

Then during the peak Ice Age of 20,000 years ago, sea levels dropped more than 400' and the bay became a dramatically wide flat river valley with dry grass and drifting sand dunes. Outside the Golden Gate and west of the coastal ranges the low sea level exposed the entire continental shelf, with dry grasslands and dunes reaching another 30 miles westward to beyond the Farallon Islands. Archeologists have dubbed the Serengeti-like landscape during this period the "Franciscan Valley" and the "Farallon Plains", which had a combined area of approximately 3 million acres. The combined river flows of the Central and Franciscan Valleys carved deep river canyons through the Carquinez Straight, Raccoon Straight (between Tiburon and Angel Island), and the Golden Gate, out across the Farallon Plain, and past the "Farallon Ridge" (the Farallon Islands were high and dry!). When the huge river finally reached the edge of the continental shelf it fell over a massive waterfall, estimated to have been much larger than Niagara Falls, and down to the Pacific Ocean.

E. Breck Parkman, a senior archaeologist for the California Department of Parks and Recreation, wrote that the period of the mega-fauna started during the middle and late Pleistocene, an epoch that started 2.6 million years ago and ended about 11,700 years ago, when the Earth was thawing out from the Ice Age. The gigantic beasts, which migrated from Asia across the now-vanished Behring Land Bridge (called Beringia), are known as Rancholabrean megafauna, after the famous La Brea tar pits in downtown Los Angeles.



Animals living during this period on what were basically broad open plains with little vegetation as cover had to be able to sense prey and/or danger at tremendous distances, and then be able to move quickly. Animals that could not move quickly had to be of immense enough size to overpower predators. The Bay Area was teeming with giant sloths the size of oxen, giant horses, ancient camels, and large-headed llamas. Giant Bison stood eight feet tall at the shoulder and weighed as much as 4,000 pounds. Their horns could be seven feet wide. Parkman estimated that at their peak, there were upward of 200,000 in the San Francisco

Region. Columbian Mammoths, members of the elephant family and related to the woolly mammoths, stood 13 feet at the shoulder and could weigh as much as 24,000 pounds - almost twice as much as a modern-day African elephant. Their curved tusks could be 16 feet long. Over 700 of these behemoths lived in our area. Short-faced Bears; Saber-Toothed *Smilodons*, American Lions, other big cats, and Dire Wolves were the primary predators. The skies were ruled by Giant Condors and the rivers had giant Saber-Toothed Salmon!

The first humans in San Francisco were the so-called Paleo-Indians. Exactly when they arrived from Siberia is a matter of dispute, but many scholars believe they got here around 15,000 years ago, just in time to see as well as possibly hasten the demise of the last mammoths.



BIRD COLUMN: NO NESTING HERONS THIS YEAR-The big news from the March 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk is a non-happening: the Great Blue Herons that were assessing the island trees for nest sites seem to have decided not to buy. After a couple of months of staking out cormorant nests, playing with sticks, and looking over the trees on a neighboring island, they were all gone this time. Maybe next year....

The Double-crested Cormorants continued to fill the now-bare trees, though their numbers seemed down a bit - perhaps, the speculation went, they've moved to the old Bay Bridge, which seems to be crowded with them. The winter-resident Belted Kingfisher was gone (as usual when the cormorants really get going), but a lot of the winter ducks were still around: orange-headed Canvasbacks (seen in March for the first time since 2012), both Greater and Lesser Scaup (black heads, gray backs, white wings), Ruddy Ducks (many impressively ruddy, with bright blue bills), Bufflehead (tiny black and white ducks), and Common Goldeneyes and Red-breasted Mergansers (mostly females, gray with reddish brown heads and otherwise looking nothing at all like one another).

Many of the Eared and Horned Grebes were in nearly full breeding plumage (both looking like steel and copper sculptures, with gold sprays behind the eyes for the former and flat gold ram's-horn patterns for the latter), and the big long-necked Clark's and Western Grebes could actually be told apart by the placement of their eyes in relation to the black on their heads (in the white for the former and the black for the latter - frustrating most of the year as the region in question goes gray on both species). A pair of Western Grebes were swimming together and neck-dancing, and we stood and watched for ten minutes hoping they'd rise up and run across the surface together... but they didn't, and there were warblers and woodpeckers still to chase.

So we went off and watched a pair of Black Phoebes (black with a white vest) building a nest, and a solitary Bushtit (gray like a flying mouse, and never seen alone at other seasons of the year) collecting nesting material. A Cedar Waxwing (mustard gold with a black mask, also rarely seen alone) posed like a Christmas ornament at the top of a pine tree, and the last of the White-crowned Sparrows foraged around on the ground. And the warblers and woodpeckers didn't disappoint, either; all told, we saw 46 species, and enjoyed yet another grand day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day.... 🐾

EDITOR: Ray Perman - "The Tidings" is published by the Lake Merritt Institute (LMI) for the purpose of publicizing the work of the organization, as well as providing articles of interest regarding the environment, and natural and anthropological history of Lake Merritt, and its surroundings. Comments and contributed articles are welcome. Please feel free to contact me directly: ["rgperman@gmail.com"](mailto:rgperman@gmail.com) 🐾

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