

THE TIDINGS



LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

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WINTER IS COMING.....

And with it the delights, the fears, the trash and plummeting dissolved oxygen that mark the season at Lake Merritt.

The Pacific Flyway - Winter brings migratory bird species from all over the continent of North America via the Pacific Flyway to rest and gain strength on their journey south, or just to hang out until spring. You can enjoy them free of charge -- an ecosystem service -- as long as we can maintain the quality of their habitat in the nation's first Wildlife Refuge (1870).

The Big Flush - It can happen anytime now. Most of the Bay Area's rainfall occurs from November to February. We call the first big rain of the wet season "The Big Flush" because it washes the dry season's accumulated trash and debris from city streets into the storm drain system and on into Lake Merritt through 62 storm drain outfalls. (See The Tidings Jan 2018).

We have had a very dry fall (partly because of global warming, climate research suggests). Trash has built up from careless littering and dumping. Drowned e-Scooters and debris from celebrations and shifting homeless encampments have made things worse. Another water quality problem looms with the rains -- low dissolved oxygen. The fresh rain water floats on top of the brackish (salty) lake water like a lid that prevents oxygen in the air from diffusing in, while chemicals in runoff can consume oxygen. The problem is exacerbated by the closure of the tide gates at the 7th Street Flood Control Station to prevent flooding.

Lake Merritt has been declared an impaired body of water by the E.P.A. because of trash in the water and low dissolved oxygen. The city must meet yearly trash reduction goals set by the regional water quality board and take steps to improve water quality in the lake.

The Lake Merritt Institute staff and volunteers are on the front lines defending the Lake and Bay from winter's onslaught. You can help fight the good fight by volunteering. Visit our website at lakemerrittinstitute.org, for details or call LMI's office at 510-238-2290. *****LOVE YOUR LAKE!**



Central Park NY has nothing on us! A **Wood Duck** visited the Lake for first time since 2004. See Hilary Powers' Golden Gate Audubon column below; Photo by Steven Summers at the Rotary Nature Center. 10/11/18

LMI in November: 1540 lbs. of trash were removed from the lake in October totaling 20,940 pounds total so far in 2018.

60 E-Scooters removed from lake in October!!

LMI Director James Robinson and LMI Staff hosted 261 volunteers, made 3 educational presentations. (0.04 inches rain recorded by LMI rain gauge).

“IT’S SHOW TIME AT ROTARY NATURE CENTER!”



Karis Griffin, Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development Supervisor in charge of the Rotary Nature Center, announced on October 12th that “The Rotary Nature Center is in the final stages of rehabilitation and refresh.”

Funded by a generous private donation, visible upgrades are a welcome sign. Voters got a preview of the inside as they cast ballots amid shrouded contents on November 8th. The exterior of the historic building has been painted gray-blue with white trim (left photo), while the interior has been painted over throughout a beige/yellow color (photo below right).

Re-flooring and opening of a dedicated bathroom will follow before “an official celebratory opening sometime in January 2019 – approximately one year from our community gathering on Jan. 24th, 2018,” Ms. Griffin said. She continued, “In the next months, OPR&YD will be preparing nature education programs for all ages, to be offered in the New Year as well as contacting community program partners like Golden Gate Audubon, STEM Programs for Youth, Exploring Urban Park Biodiversity, Community for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants, and Bar Coding the Lake.”



Of great concern in the community since January 2018 has been the continuity of the nature center’s historic mission as an interpretive education center and overseer for the nation’s first wildlife refuge. Plans for the physical upgrade and development of program at the center have been shared in only general terms by OPR&YD. A citizens’ coalition, the Rotary Nature Center Friends, is now seeking to offer assistance as a nonprofit to raise funds, pursue grants and partnerships to help Oakland realize the Rotary Nature Center’s potential. There can hardly be a more important goal in this time of unprecedented environmental disruption and social inequality that we face today. Contact The Tidings Editor at ktnoon@aol.com for more information about the Rotary Nature Center Friends.

A Climate Bell Chimes, and a Stark Warning



What looks like a high-tech wind chime outside the front entrance of the Oakland Museum is actually part of a city-wide art installation created by Exploratorium Artist in Residence, Rosten Woo. “Mutual Air” is a network of BELLS that translate the composition of the air at each site into sound and will show disparities in air quality within Oakland. See [Mutual Air.org](http://MutualAir.org) for more details.

The bells chime in response to particulate matter (from diesel, dust and fires) and to the greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, generated by all kinds of combustion. They chimed furiously on Saturday November 10th in the apocalyptic haze caused by the Camp fire in Butte County. [Click to Hear](#).

OMCA’s Mutual Air Bell

The global average CO₂ is now 406 parts per million. On October 8th The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a strong warning that world carbon emissions must be cut drastically by 2030 to avoid global warming above the 1.5 degree Celsius limit set by the United Nations Paris Agreement in 2015. Environmental consequences of not doing so would be catastrophic. Local readings in Oakland can be 400-600 ppm.

Tips Requested Concerning Trespassing Incident in the Wildlife Refuge - October 10th-11th



Piano recovered from the lake.

On the night of October 10th-11th, vandals broke into the Lake Merritt Boating Center. They stole several boats to transport an estimated 100 people to the bird islands for an illicit party.

In the course of the incident, wildlife was disturbed and the vegetation on the islands was trampled. The boom that blocks off the Trestle Glen arm of the lake during migratory bird season was broken. Trash, including portable toilets, was left behind. A piano dumped into the lake took half a day to pull out, which was time away from the Lake Merritt Institute staff's regular duties. Perhaps the saddest cost was to the City's recreational programs for disadvantaged youngsters, who had to wait for boats and equipment to be cleaned and repaired.

The cost of the escapade was far greater than the thoughtless perpetrators probably imagined, equaling thousands of dollars for cleaning and repairs. These were not homeless people seeking shelter but young adults who should have known better. If you know anything about what happened that night please contact the Oakland Police or the Lake Merritt Boating Center.

Alameda County Watershed Confluence Conference

The Alameda County Watershed Confluence met for the first time on October 17th at the Scottish Rite Center on Lakeside Drive. It is a county-wide conference designed to provide a forum for local groups, community members and representatives from the public and private sectors interested in creek and watershed health to meet, network, share innovative ideas and inspire new partnerships in watershed management in Alameda County.

The Friends of Sausal Creek and the Golden Gate Audubon Society received awards for their achievements in watershed and conservation education.



Tidings Editor Katie Noonan and Mr. Faulkner's Students from St. Paul's Episcopal Middle School presented a poster on their E.P.A. Citizen Monitoring of *E. coli* in the Lake.

Holiday Caroling On Lake Merritt – From Saturday, December 1 until Sunday, December 23, the Lake Merritt Boating Center is offering on-the-water caroling tours launching from 568 Bellevue Avenue inside Lakeside Park. Enjoy some time in the Holiday room with hot cider and cookies before beginning your voyage around Lake Merritt. Experience a unique view of Oakland as your Water Sleigh glides past the Holiday Cove before returning to the Boating Center. The admission fee is \$8 per person or \$120 for the whole boat. For more information, please visit www.sailoakland.com or contact Sarah Herbelin, Boating Supervisor, at sherbelin@oaklandca.gov.

THANK YOU TO OUR OCTOBER VOLUNTEERS! Volunteer groups in October included Holy Names University and High School in honor of their 150th Anniversary, American Indian High School, National Charity League, St. Paul's Episcopal School, Park Day Middle School, UC Berkeley, Future Estates, Our U-Clean-It self-organized teams, and the LMI A-TEAM regulars. We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job!

eScooters in Lake Merritt – An Editorial by The Lake Merritt Institutes’ director James Robinson.

In October, we pulled out over sixty eScooters from Lake Merritt! The Lake Merritt Institute met recently with representatives from both Lime and Bird eScooter companies and a representative from Oakland’s Department of Transportation (OakDOT) to address this crisis.

Lake Merritt is the oldest wildlife refuge in North America! We must protect our beautiful yet fragile lake and its inhabitants.

Some key suggestions for action from that meeting:

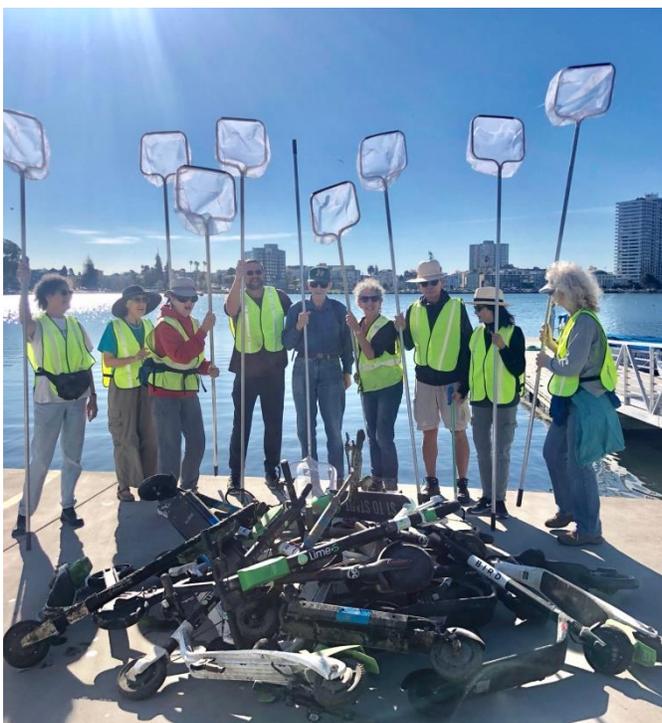
- Create “no parking” zones near the lake
- Create and formalize “standard operating procedures” (SOPs) for eScooters.
- Incorporate and refer to SOPs in eScooter permit Terms and Conditions
- Create educational material for concerned citizens, for example, “What to do when you find a eScooter in the lake?”
- Increase and report results of regular visual sweeps of Lake Merritt

The meeting seemed promising with both companies seemingly ready and willing to help, but it also seemed eerily similar to the first meeting. Actions proposed at the previous meeting have failed to stop e-Scooter dumping. To the contrary, it has increased significantly.

Actions speak louder than words; here are some outcomes that would ease our concerns about eScooters:

- Reduced number of eScooters in Lake Merritt every month from current count of sixty until we reach zero.
- eScooter companies being proactive about keeping their products out of the lake.
- Faster removal times for eScooters removed from lake.

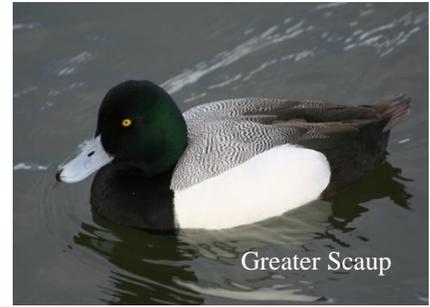
OakDOT is in the process of creating policies for a permit that eScooter companies will need to operate in Oakland. Contact Oakland Department of Transportation and your council member for more information.



“A-Team” volunteers, October 2018

High Season Opens at Lake Merritt - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon Society

It's easy to see the season changing at Lake Merritt, and not just by the floats spanning the lake instead of surrounding the islands*, or the leaves starting to drift off the trees. The birds are back! Not all of them in great numbers yet, but besides flocks of Ruddy Ducks and Pied-billed Grebes, the October 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon group saw the first scaup of the season (probably a Greater Scaup, but he was floating with his head down most of the time), the first Canvasback (a sand-colored female, also doing the meatloaf act), and a pair of Horned Grebes (the tiny white-necked ones, not seen here on an October walk since 2009). And, not "back" but here for the first time in the history of these walks, a male Wood Duck in full alternate plumage (the bright version) swam with the Mallards around the nature center. According to park personnel, he'd been there for about three weeks, taking the edge off the magic but providing some hope: check out the lake – he might still be there.



Wood Duck at the Rotary Nature Center. Steven Summers, 10/14/18

And it was loud. A female Belted Kingfisher flew from the islands to circle the globe cage and back a couple of times, rattle-calling all the way. Down at water level, half a dozen streaky brown juvenile Black-crowned Night-Herons flapped from island to island and up and down between rocks and branches, shouting like kids on recess. No idea why; they're usually as silent as the gray-suited adults (several of which stood around ignoring them). Crows ran a Red-shouldered Hawk off the biggest island tree and tried to do the same to a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk munching something in one of the abandoned cormorant nests – but the red-tail ignored them, finishing the snack and sitting peacefully for several minutes. Later we were treated to some three-way raptor/corvid action, with the two hawks and a lot of crows in the air all at once, mixing it up so it wasn't clear what was chasing what.

Adult (white-headed) and juvenile (mouse-colored) Brown Pelicans lined the floats, crowding the juvenile Double-crested Cormorants still in residence, and patrolled in circles over the lake among clouds of gulls. In addition, three American White Pelicans swam and fished together; later we saw them circling for altitude, shining in the sun and showing off their startling array of flight feathers. How that much black can be totally hidden when they're on the surface is a constant amazement!

Lakeside Park and the garden had crowds of Yellow-rumped Warblers (missing since last March) busily fly-catching, branch-picking, ground-nibbling, and generally living by their basic maxim: Anything anybody eats is food! Butter-butts are almost always the most numerous warbler to be found because – unlike most warblers, which have preferred feeding modes – they've specialized in not specializing. Today they were not just most common but alone; the other fall warblers didn't show up at all. The lawns were hopping with other birds, though, most notably gray-crested Oak Titmice and brilliant Western Bluebirds, and Nuttall's Woodpeckers seemed to be giving their soft police-whistle calls from trees in all directions – while managing to stay thoroughly out of sight.

The trip wound up a little past noon, and those who stayed to the last finished on a high note: a Great Blue Heron and several Great Egrets flew down the lake and landed on one of the islands, joining a crowd of 20 or 30 mixed Great and Snowy Egrets that had landed there after we departed in the morning. All told, we'd seen 43 species, continuing last year's upward trend. And so another banner day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day but few are so mild and lovely as this one. ***

*****AUDUBON BIRDWALKS AT THE LAKE:** Join bird expert Hilary Powers any fourth Wednesday of the month for a free "Birdwalk" at the lake. Muster at the geodesic bird cage near the Nature Center at 9:30 a.m. for what are always fascinating introductions to lake birdlife.***

CLIMATE CORNER: WHY IS EXXON SUPPORTING A CARBON TAX?

A Guest editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

In an October 9th article, the Washington Post printed that ExxonMobil will give one million dollars to Americans for Carbon Dividends (<https://www.afcd.org/>) to support a carbon tax and dividend plan. “The tax would be \$40 per ton of carbon dioxide” that would be emitted by burning gasoline. Passing the tax along to consumers would result in the cost of gas going up by about 36 cents per gallon. The costs of natural gas and coal would also rise. Money from the tax would be returned to Americans via dividend checks, direct deposits or contributions to their IRA accounts. A border adjustment would be included to ensure fair trade, and the carbon tax would gradually rise. Other companies supporting the plan include Exelon, BP, First Solar, General Motors, Shell, Total and PepsiCo” according to the Post article.

Why is Exxon supporting a carbon tax and dividend as proposed by Americans for Carbon Dividends?

There are several reasons, including the certainty that a such a policy would bring to their long-range economic planning. Oil companies such as Exxon have built carbon pricing into their forecasts, and knowing what the future will bring is better than betting on policies such as cap and trade, where the carbon price jumps up and down. The plan would also use powerful market forces to favor renewable energy, and shift us toward being carbon neutral, which is a good thing.

But there are more insidious reasons.

The plan, in exchange for taxing carbon emissions, would hamstring government regulations that would control such emissions. A case in point is the Obama Clean Power Plan. Though this plan was never enforced, such laws are anathema to fossil fuel companies, and they would like to be free of them.



But perhaps the worst aspect of the plan, and possibly a major reason for its formulation, is that it would end liability for emitters in court, preventing lawsuits that would hold oil companies liable for climate change damages due to the use of their products. This immediately brings to mind Youth vs. Gov (<https://www.youthv.gov/>) and the several lawsuits being brought by cities and states. If I were an oil company executive facing the possibility of paying for sea level rise, deaths due to heat waves, agricultural losses, hurricane devastation, drought and climate refugees, I would be afraid.

But maybe it is us who should be afraid. Governments cannot completely protect us from firestorms, hurricanes or long-term sea level rise of several feet. There have been, are now, and will be increasing costs from climate change. If the deep pocket companies at the root of the problem cannot be held responsible. Who will pay? Hint: Look in your pocket.

What then is a better solution?

It is a carbon tax, and dividend such as proposed by the Citizens’ Climate Lobby, but WITHOUT the get out of jail free card that Americans for Carbon Dividends is proposing. Our children, and theirs, deserve a better future than one dictated by fossil fuel companies. A carbon fee and dividend without preventing the courts from enforcing our right to sue, is a far more powerful incentive for fossil fuel companies to clean up their act.

In reality (sigh) the direction of our (?) government is such that regulations to control climate change are being thrown out the window, and courts are being shifted toward ignoring the constitutional right to a clean atmosphere. One can only hope that retribution lies in the ballot box, after which we can get down to passing a bi-partisan carbon fee and dividend that promotes social justice, and does not let fossil fuel companies off the hook.

THANK YOU TO OUR OCTOBER VOLUNTEERS! We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job!



Holy Names University and High School



Holy Names University and High School



Holy Names University and High School



Park Day Middle School



Future Ventures



Park Day Middle School



Laney College Geography Class tests Channel water



Students help clean the lake. Thank you!

Oakland's Sister City Sends Community Ambassadors - Youth Science Collaborations

Japanese Community Ambassadors from the 85-year-old Fukuoka Oakland Friendship Association (FOFA) visited Lake Merritt earlier this month. They attended the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club and visited the Torii at the Garden Center. Later, they met with St. Paul's Episcopal Middle School math and science teachers, Anthony Bald and Ryan Faulkner, and their classes, and Tidings Editor Katie Noonan to talk about citizen science opportunities for young people and St. Paul's 25-year legacy of Lake Merritt monitoring. The visitors wrote back that they learned a lot about the Lake Merritt environment from the kids, including the fact that the Japanese Bubble Snail lives here! The sixth graders impressed the visitors with their knowledge of science and the lively policy discussion about stakeholders at the lake.

Like Oakland, Fukuoka has a famous "lake" in the middle of its city at Ōhori Park (shown below), with many hydrologic and sociologic similarities to Lake Merritt. It was formed by human intervention in 1929 and contains brackish water. There is a science museum on its shores similar to the Rotary Nature Center. The public loves to hang out at the lake, ~ 1.5 miles in perimeter, and refers to it as "living room Lake." Plans are in the works for sharing citizen science activities and friendship between Japanese and American students at St. Paul's and at other Oakland schools and youth groups at the soon-to-be-opened Rotary Nature Center.

Thank you to FOFA delegation, St. Paul's students and teachers!



Fukuoka Community Ambassadors at the Garden Center Torii: (from left) Community Organizer Takanori Yoshiura, Architect Mikiko Endo, Community Liaison and former Oakland Resident Honomi Ijima and FOFA President Taichi Goto.



St. Paul's Episcopal Middle School teachers and students.



Lake in Ōhori Park (大濠公園 Ōhori-kōen);
<http://www.ohorikouen.jp/>



St Paul's Middle School students demonstrate how they test water samples for dissolved oxygen.

“Woody and Hoody” at the Rotary Nature Center Fenced-in Wildlife Refuge:

A wood duck, nicknamed Woody by OPR&YD naturalists, arrived at the wildlife sanctuary on October 11th. He has attracted many visitors from the birding world and was almost “re-located” by well-meaning but misguided citizens. Wood ducks are resident though rare in the Oakland area. Woody belongs here and appears to be doing just fine. He and other waterfowl have spent many days loafing at the fenced in area. The naturalists said they had not noticed any unusual behavior during the current air quality crisis. It is good to know that they are looking out for the birds.

Woody was joined by “Hoody” a Hooded Merganser, which made a brief appearance last week.

The fenced-in area has not been renovated since the days when bird-banding and bird feeding were major attractions in Oakland. It contains useless concrete and metal structures and decades of compacted bird guano. Perhaps it is time to develop a plan for better stewardship of the Rotary Nature Center, fenced-in wildlife refuge and islands -- for the birds and for people.



← Above and left: Woody mingles with other birds in the fenced-in area.



← Above and near left: “Hoody”, a Hooded Merganser, at the Rotary Nature Center fenced in wildlife refuge.

Far left: Raccoons, including an albino form present at the Lake, prowl the area.

Photos by Steven Summers.

REFERENCES for the November Newsletter articles

The Big Flush:

[Weather/Climate Discussion](#) by [Daniel Swain](#)

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A Climate Bell Chimes

<https://datebook.sfchronicle.com/entertainment/arts-ends-mutual-air-sounds-an-alarm-for-air-pollution>

<https://www.facebook.com/katharine.m.noonan/videos/10158123815678747/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report> (Note photo of wildfires)

<https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/oaklands-poorest-neighborhoods-will-the-most-susceptible-to-flooding-due-to-climate-change-and-sea-level-rise/Content?oid=6401808>

EDITOR: Katie Noonan—"The Tidings" is published by the Lake Merritt Institute (LMI) entirely with private funding donated to LMI, and not with funds from the City of Oakland. To contribute to LMI, use PayPal at the LMI website (lakemerrittinstitute.org) or send a check to: Lake Merritt Institute, 568 Bellevue Ave., Oakland, CA 94610-5026. LMI is a California State non-profit corporation; IRS Code 501(c)(3): EIN 94-3214160