Spring Success at the Salt Marsh

Pickleweed sprouts and new salt grass runners crisscross the open spaces in between the waterfowl exclosures (cages to keep the birds out) at the restoration salt marsh between 10 and 12th Streets along the Lake Merritt channel. The beach was flattened out by heavy winter flows. Ancient tiles and chunks of wood eroded out of the sediment from the underlying landfill at the waterline. But, the native plants and the invasive weeds survived the rains of winter just fine.

Joel Peter installed more fencing between the exclosures to protect the new sprouts. On Earth Day the Weed Warriors removed much non-native overgrowth. The effort must continue (look for Salt Marsh enthusiast & Weed Warrior notices).

The restored salt marsh will provide habitat for wildlife, a scenic view for passers-by, and an educational resource for Laney College, local schools and the wider community.

Joel installed new fencing and carefully freed native plants from invasive brass buttons (Photos: K. Noonan 2017).
LMI on the Front Line in Oakland’s Struggle to Meet 2017 Trash Permit Goals

Bottom line is Oakland is falling behind its State Water Board Permit mandated goal of 70% trash reduction (over 2012 levels) by this July. The whopping 171,564 lbs of trash collected from the Lake Merritt Watershed in 2015-2016 contributed to only a 47% reduction for the City and this year the City is down to 44.6%.

Oakland Watershed Manager, Lesley Estes, notes that the Permit report does not credit the City for its Excess Litter Fee on high-waste businesses nor its aggressive illegal dumping campaign. She said that fining the City for failing to meet the target % would be counter-productive to reaching the permit goal.

Paul Ledesma of Save the Bay points out that other communities have made progress toward their goals by collecting a stormwater fee with property taxes to create a dedicated funding source for upgrading sewer and storm drain systems.

April has been a record month for LMI events, with Earth Day, clean-up days for businesses and schools (see Gallery below) and presentations to schools. Together with Lake Merritt Institute weekly volunteers like Sabine McCarthy and Margaret Phillips (above photo), the 299 LMI volunteers collected a whopping 3,300 lbs of trash in April for a total of 12,140 lbs so far this year.

What’s Up with the Rotary Nature Center closure?

The Rotary Nature Center has been closed for over a month now (since March 17th). LMI interviewed City Office of Parks and Recreation (OP&R) Assistant Director Karis Griffin to get clarification on the situation.

Ms. Griffin reassured us that the Nature Center will re-open soon, most likely in early June. The nature of the cleaning has required special testing for chemical safety (arsenic in taxidermy) that has delayed the process. OP&R is taking care to preserve the historic character of the center while completing long overdue repairs and cleaning. The living animals are being cared for and groups that met at the center have been given alternate meeting places in the interim. Summer programs for children will continue as planned and parents may sign up online.

Griffin explained that the City would like to expand uses of the facility to provide income for the City. She suggested that these uses might include “art-friendly” and exercise oriented events. The current natural history programs will continue but on a fee basis. In lean economic times, the City is asking the Nature Center to support more of its operational costs.

The Center was built in 1953 as a natural history museum under the guidance of Paul Covel, the Duck Refuge’s legendary naturalist, through funds donated by the Oakland Rotary Club as well as a Boy Scout memorial fund in honor of Oakland Naturalist Brighton C. “Bugs” Cain. BC Cain was a Stanford-trained...
naturalist who worked for the Oakland Boy Scouts as their Naturalist from 1919 until 1950. Inside the Nature Center are some of BC Cain’s bug collections that were once located in the famed "Bug House" at the Camp Dimond scout camp. Many citizens feel strongly that it must retain its primary role as a natural history museum for all the residents of Oakland. According to Dr. Jim Carlton, Smithsonian National Ocean Hero who grew up in Oakland, the Center "has had incredible value in the nurturing of young scientists for many decades.”

If you have questions or input for OP&R, please contact Nicholas Williams (Director) at inwilliams@oaklandnet.com. You can also join Friends of Lake Merritt at: communityforlakemerritt.org (CFLM) and its FaceBookpagehttps://www.facebook.com/communityforlakemerritt/to stay in the loop.

**Sad Survivor at Lake Merritt – Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon**

The most memorable sight of the April 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon bird walk was not a happy one: a male scaup huddled in shallow water, right wing looking scorched. The covert feathers were yellow and crinkled instead of smooth and bright white, and the flight feathers were a bristling wreck: each had its central shaft and side barbs, but no barbules (the little fibers that knit a feather together) at all. Probably doomed. Any sort of flight seemed unlikely on that wing and flight to the far northern breeding grounds impossible, but swimming away from a rescue attempt would have been a near certainty. No idea what could cause that much damage and leave the bird alive. We wandered on in a grim mood, only to be astonished back into good cheer by the sight of a male Western Bluebird perched on a stump about 15 feet off the path and catching all the light a gray day could offer, which was enough to make him seem to glow from the inside. He and Mrs. Bluebird fluttered around the ring-o-lights wires, probably worried about a nest in the area, until we left.

Overall, the species count was predictably down (to 36), but we got good looks at a couple of Green Herons and a Belted Kingfisher on one of the islands, and enjoyed watching the cormorant rookery in full swing there... and, less welcome, in one of the trees overhanging the path from the playground. Many of the birds still had their double crests, and the males were actively fetching sticks for nest construction even though we spotted one baby out on a branch. There could well have been more - but branchers are as big as their parents, recognizable only by having brownish feathers, paler on the breast, which is hard to spot when they’re silhouetted against the sky. This one was facing the sun and almost white from throat to belly, making it stand out.

Hank-the-rescue-pelican cruised by so close to the shore that we could watch his pouch underwater, swelling to a pale yellow globe and shrinking down to a bright orange strip as he raised his head. He was all alone again this month.

The winter birds were almost all gone except for a Western Grebe, a couple of Eared Grebes in their party clothes, and another (uninjured) scaup, but we did see one female Common Goldeneye. She was swimming outside the floats (which now curve around the islands in summer mode rather than crossing the lake), the first April sighting since I started keeping track in 2009.

So life and death go on. The weather was cold and threatening (but not delivering) rain, and the day was still better at Lake Merritt than anywhere else....
Are you going to a western national park in the mountains this summer? If so, be prepared for an ugly shock. As shown in this National Geographic map, our warming climate has created conditions that have allowed pine bark beetles to flourish. All across parks ranging from the Rockies to Yellowstone to Glacier and on into Canada, dead trees fill the landscape.

To someone who values our natural resources, this impact of climate change is truly ugly.

If you can withstand more bad news on a planetary scale, it is highly recommended that you watch the movie “Before the Flood” produced by Leonardo DiCaprio. Interviews with climate scientists, politicians, and activists trying to slow the destruction are punctuated by mind boggling images of a rapidly changing planet. Seen from space and on the ground, these scenes depict how a small group of deniers have hijacked our political process, and how the results of their deception are leading to sea level rise, ocean acidification, and extreme weather. The film also provides a glimpse of hope, but was made before the last American election.

The good news comes from the Citizens’ Climate Lobby, which reports that 36 members of the House of Representatives have joined the Climate Solutions Caucus, which educates members on economically-viable options to reduce climate risk and protect our nation’s economy, security, infrastructure, agriculture, water supply, and public safety. The caucus has equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats, and (wouldn’t you know it) five of the eighteen democrats are from California. That sensible Republicans are stepping up to the plate refutes the anarchistic, obsolete and moth eaten premise that climate change is not real, dangerous, and self-inflicted.

If you support the good instead of the ugly or the bad, let your voice for a price on carbon be heard. In concrete terms, a $45 per ton carbon tax would simply mean:*  

- Gasoline prices return to where they were last summer.
- Crude oil prices return to 2009-10 levels.
- Electricity prices increase 3c per kWh, about the same as moving from New Jersey to Massachusetts.

Such a tax on carbon emissions would be more effective than current and proposed regulations, and would create more jobs. So don’t let the ugly win; support the good now.

*https://niskanencenter.org/blog/debating-carbon-taxes-oren-cass-bill-gates/
CORRECTION – Not just fresh water, but flood control gates and record runoff probably killed rays!!

KPIX mistakenly told viewers that low salinities caused the bat ray die-off in the lake last February. However, LMI’s James Robinson and Katie Noonan had clearly explained that chemical run-off and entrapment behind flood control gates (both related to rainfall) probably contributed to the deaths as well. See East Bay Express article (April 12) discussion 4.

Now, Bay Nature (May 2) 8 has a feature article about the shark and ray die-off. In the article Mark Okihiro of California Fish and Wildlife presents evidence that a fungus that bloomed in runoff water killed leopard sharks and bat rays. LMI looks forward to more research and monitoring of rays and sharks in LM and the Bay.

Guidelines for what to do if you encounter a dead or dying ray will be posted on LMI billboards. 1) Call or text the CDFW hotline at 1-888-334-CalTIP (888-334-2258) or Pelagic Shark Research Foundation at 831-459-9346 (Office) or 831-600-5215 (Cell); or email psrf@pelagic.org 2) Take a video or photo if possible 3) Notify local agency in charge of disposal.

Ray* of Hope – People’s Climate March and a Day Without Coal

Always optimistic, late Tidings Editor Ray* Perman would have cheered two recent news stories:

A thousand Bay Area citizens met at the Lake Merritt Amphitheatre and marched to demand action on looming climate change 5. According to CalMatters 6, sea levels could rise 10 feet this century and the Bay shoreline move 2.5 football fields inland – inundating the quiet refuge of the lake for people and wildlife.

And across the sea, Britain had its first day without coal since the Industrial Revolution, using only renewable energy 7 … in honor of late Tidings Editor. Ray* Perman

SALUTE OUR 299 APRIL VOLUNTEERS!

Kudos to Acorn Woodland Elementary School fourth grade, Holy Names College Women’s and Men’s Soccer Teams, Trinity Consultants Employees, Borrego Solar Systems Employees, UC Riverside volunteers, Rincon Consultants, Oakland Education Association (OEA), students and families, the A-TEAM regular LMI Team, LMI Board Members on Earth Day. We appreciate their efforts and community spirit immensely! Photos of the groups are below in the email edition, and can be seen online at lakemerritt.org.

References:
3 https://localwiki.org/oakland/Rotary_Nature_Center
8 https://baynature.org/article/sharks-dying-san-francisco-bay/
http://www.lakemerritt.org/lm-links.html).
SALUTE OUR APRIL VOLUNTEERS! Acorn Woodland Elementary School fourth grade, Holy Names College Women’s and Men’s Soccer Teams, Trinity Consultants Employees, Borrego Solar Systems Employees, UC Riverside volunteers, Rincon Consultants, Oakland Education Association (OEA), students and families, the A-TEAM regular LMI Team, LMI Board Members on Earth Day.
Oakland Education Association (OEA), students and families

Trinity Consultants Employees

James and friend at Oakland Earth Expo April 6th at Frank Ogawa Plaza

Climate Rally at Lake Merritt April 29th

Public sign up for LMI Community Service Earth Day Event

LMI Staff and Board Members set up for Earth Day

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
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