SHOWERS BRING MAY FLOWERS — Although April brought no more than about 2” of rain, the almost 5” of rain in both January and February, and 4” in March, helped the ridgelines of the East Bay Hills to produce marvelous fields of flowers the likes of which have not seen for almost half a decade of drought. Grab friends and hike a ridge ASAP. Tilden Park’s Nimitz Trail is a good one.

Up the Trestle Glen Arm in Splash Pad Park (site of the Grand Lake Farmer’s Market (http://splashpad.org/causes/farmers-market/), the beds planted in native flowers by the Splash Pad Organization’s Mary Jo Sutton, "Grand Crew's" native plant guru and her dedicated group of volunteers, are in full bloom.

For Lake Merritt butterfly lovers, in the April edition of the Splash Pad newsletter (http://splashpad.org), director Ken Katz reports that Monarch butterfly caterpillars can be seen munching on the bounty of plants.

Should any reader feel like volunteering to help maintain the health of Splash Pad Park, please contact Ken Katz via the Splash Pad Organization website.

PLACE NAMES – WHAT’S IN A LAKE? - Geographers know from history that, generally, lakes named by Spanish or French explorers start with the word “Lake” and then are followed by an adjective or proper noun (e.g. Lake Huron, Lake Tahoe, Lake Anza, etc.). Whereas, with lakes named by British/Anglo explorers, the word “Lake” follows (e.g. Pyramid Lake, Washoe Lake, etc.). After the Gold Rush this naming protocol was no longer followed. As for our beloved lake, the name sequence is as follows: Estuario San Antonio (1750’s), San Antonio Slough (1850’s), Lake Merritt (1870).
The Transformation

CLIMATE CORNER – Richard Bailey, PhD., Founding Board Member –

Caveman  Coal Miner  Lobbyist  Family

Horse & Buggy  Oil Well  Traffic Jam  Smog City

Wood Fire  Smokestacks  Wind  Solar

Egg  Larvae  Pupae  Butterfly
BIRDIN’ IN THE RAIN AT LAKE MERRITT – Hilary Powers - The 4th-Wednesday birding group gathered in April under a cloudy sky, assuring one another that the rain would probably hold off till after noon. Incorrectly. Within half an hour the sky opened up and we took shelter in the Nature Center museum, along with a squirrel and a duck. Seriously, a real duck - the black Muscovy with the white panels on its wings, to be exact - came stomping through both sets of doors and made itself at home in the museum.

We’d already seen some unusual sights. Several of the little white Forster’s Terns were perched on the floats or soaring to fish (photo at left), and three different types of swallows - Tree and Violet-green as well as the brown Northern Rough-winged that nest along the stone sides of the lake - were swooping overhead. A few of the Double-crested Cormorants crowding the nests still had wisps of crest left, though most were back to their normal snake-headed look. In addition, a surprising number of scaup were swimming around the islands, the drakes showing off the brilliant white wings that will take them to their breeding grounds in pursuit of the bulk of their flock, long since departed.

But that wasn’t enough to call it a day so early. As soon as the downpour tapered off to a steady drizzle, we headed down the lake shore. More lingering scaup, both Greater and Lesser, some mostly ruddy Ruddy Ducks, and a few Pied-billed Grebes. We were dished on the big Clark’s or Western Grebes we hoped to see, but did enjoy some Eared Grebes in their bejeweled breeding plumage (photo at left) - along with one probable Horned Grebe that dove too quickly for its species to be altogether certain.

As we headed back up the lake to cross to the park, what looked like a Snowy Egret flying straight toward us turned out to be a much rarer visitor: a Caspian Tern (with a 50" wingspread, almost twice that of a Forster’s Tern). It looped back and forth for a while, providing a glorious good look at its graceful hunt (Photo at left; Clara Cohen).

The rain kept the small tree-perching birds more or less under cover, though we did see one or two of most of the usual suspects - chickadees (photo below left; Nature Mapping Foundation) and a titmouse (Photo below right) and one(!) Bushtit (missing the usual huge flock) - and had a good stroll through the garden, emerging to a gleam of sun. The species count was down to 32, but no regrets - it was a wetter-than-usual good day, but still a good day indeed at Lake Merritt.
EARTHDAY AT LMI - Saturday, April 23rd, LMI celebrated Earthday by hosting over 50 new volunteers. Teams spread out and scoured the lake of man-made materials. The day’s bounty included not just the usual urban detritus but also a cargo pallet and 50 gallon hot-water heater. Of course, all are wondering who would dispose of a water heater in our beloved lake? Please: LOVE YOUR LAKE!

HAPPENINGS AROUND THE LAKE:

Cameron-Stanford House: See their website: http://cshouse.org
  Exhibit: “Slough, Cesspool, City Jewel: The Evolution of Lake Merritt”
  Sunday, May 1st, 12 PM: “Picture This”
  Sunday, May 7th, 12 PM: “Kentucky Derby Day”
  Sunday, May 15th: “Dr. Merritt’s Neighborhood”

Bike to Work Day: May 12th. Sprockets, do your duty!


Lake Merritt Bird Walks: Join avian expert Hilary Powers at Lake Merritt for Audubon Society guided “Bird Walks” on any fourth Wednesday of the month. Meet at the Wildlife Preserve near the large geodesic cage at 9:15 AM. Ms. Powers is a delightful bird spotter and guide. This is a “must do” for every Oaklander.

Oakland Heritage Alliance: See the OHA website to confirm: http://www.oaklandheritage.org/
  Saturday, May 14th, 10 AM: “First Christian Church: An Insider’s Look at William Weeks”
  Thursday, May 19th, 10 AM: “California Faience: Tile Maker for Julia Morgan with Kirby Brown

Oakland Museum of California (OMCA): See their website: http://museumca.org
  Friday Nights @ OMCA The new season has just started and is now even bigger and better: http://museumca.org/friday-nights-omca

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"

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