

The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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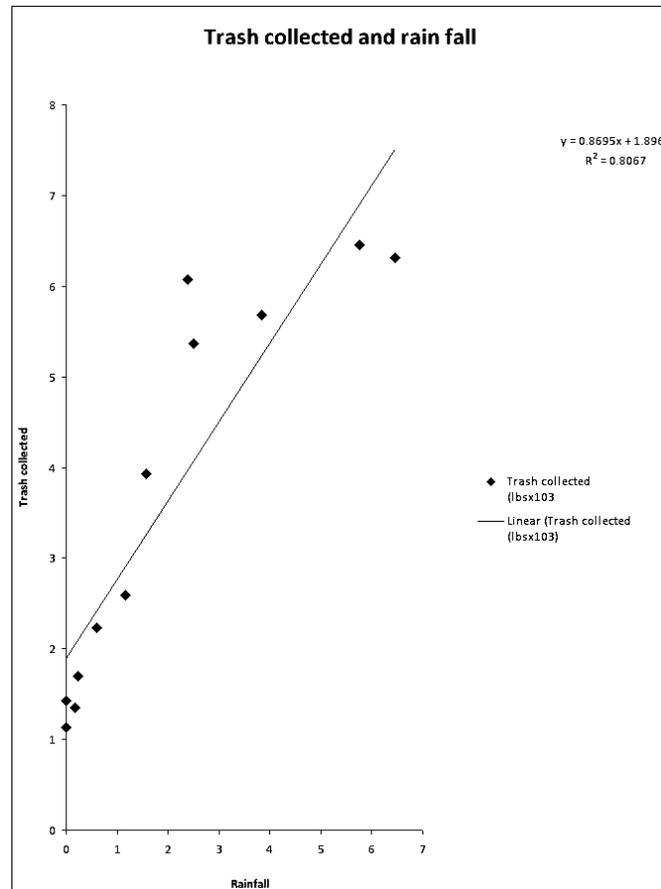
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"Tidings" is an editorial newsletter. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the City of Oakland.

THE DROUGHT AND THE TRASH: We certainly need the rain, but a beneficial side effect of its absence is less trash in Lake Merritt. As shown here in this regression analysis (a graph that shows the relationship between two things) less rain means less trash. This is, of course, because 7 square miles of watershed drain directly to our lagoon, entering via 62 storm drain outlets (they're numbered, check 'em out). Except for the few drains that lead to filters or swales, every piece of litter on the streets can end up in the Lake after a rainstorm. For now, trash is light; but it is doubtful it will stay that way.



Data is from a few years ago. Kudos to Katie Noonan and students of the Oakland High Environmental Academy for gathering the data and creating the graph.

LAKE MERRITT WILDLIFE – A VISUAL GUIDE: A few copies of the guide created by John Kirkmire, featuring photos of almost every bird you will see at the Lake, are still available. Proceeds from this one of a kind publication directly benefit the Institute and its programs.



Some of the photos from the Guide

To obtain your copy, send \$50 or more to: Lake Merritt Institute, 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610 and specify “Wildlife Guide.” Thank you for supporting this fund raising event.

CLIMATE CORNER: Two more studies have shown why (compared to the size of the problem) hardly any global progress has been made to keep climate change from getting worse.

1) As published in the journal *Climatic Change* “just 90 companies ... produced nearly two-thirds of the greenhouse gas emissions generated since the dawning of the industrial age.” The vast majority of them were in the business of producing gas, oil or coal. Fifty of these were investor owned firms such as Chevron, Exxon, BP, Shell, Peabody Energy and British Coal company. About 30 were government owned such as Saudi Aramco, Russia’s Gazprom and Norway’s Statoil. Nearly 30% of emissions were produced just by the top 20 companies. These powerful, politically connected entities are in the business of making a profit from selling fossil fuels, and they are “sitting on substantial reserves of fossil fuel which – if they are burned – puts the world at even greater risk of dangerous climate change.” Some of them are also very adept at funding climate change denial efforts. Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that the world ~~can not~~ will not agree on what to do.

“The United Nations climate change panel, the IPCC, warned in September that at current rates the world stood within 30 years of exhausting its “carbon budget” – the amount of carbon dioxide it could emit without going into the danger zone above 2C warming.” This means that children born today will live half of their lives on a dangerously warm planet, one like our civilization has never before experienced, and which will continue to get worse. (sourced from the Guardian, Nov. 2013).

2) “Dark Money” Funds Climate Change Denial Effort. As reported in *Scientific American* (Dec., 2013) “A Drexel University study finds that a large slice of donations to organizations that deny global warming are funneled through third-party pass-through organizations that conceal the original funder.” ... “the largest and most consistent funders were a number of conservative foundations promoting “ultra-free-market ideas” in many realms, among them the Searle Freedom Trust, the John Williams Pope Foundation, the Howard Charitable Foundation and the Sarah Scaife Foundation.” “Meanwhile the traceable cash flow from more traditional sources, such as Koch Industries and ExxonMobil has disappeared.” Does this mean that Exxon

and the Koch brothers now believe that climate change is real? Or are they putting their money elsewhere?

BIRD COLUMN - Big Day at Lake Merritt

A crowd of birders (26, plus the two leaders and including two or three regular leaders of other trips) saw lots of kinds of birds (55 species, the max in a long time) on the January 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk. The weather was unfortunately lovely, and the viewing was excellent. The leader population made it possible to chase down several birds that would otherwise have hidden from the group; most prominent: two Black-throated Gray Warblers (tiny black-and-white birds with burglar masks), a couple of Orange-crowned warblers (anonymous yellow-mustard birds seen only twice before since 2009), and a Red-breasted Sapsucker (an elegant red-headed bird that farms the trees, digging holes that accumulate sap and insects for a later meal).

On the lake, Hank-the-rescue-pelican had a friend again this month (the only other January sighting was in 2013), and we could see the breeding bump on his beak starting to grow. (But not on the friend's, so once again this year he probably won't get lucky.) All the expected species were there except for Horned Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneyes, and the Green Heron; that is, nine species of ducks, four of grebes, four of herons, and five of gulls, and we saw the Tufted Duck (our regular black-backed, white-winged visitor from Asia) twice, once down near El Embarcadero and then again up with the scavenger flock at the Nature Center.

The scavenger flock remains the world's best place for sorting out Greater and Lesser Scaup; the head shape (round versus baseball-cap-bad-hair) and the beak markings (black triangle versus straight nail) are easy to see with the birds swimming practically underfoot, and the lighting usually makes the unreliable but memorable head color mnemonic (green = Greater; purple = Lesser) work just fine.

We had Dark-eyed Juncos and California Towhees and four other kinds of sparrows, plus two good looks at Red-tailed Hawks and one at a fine juvenile Cooper's Hawk (recognizable by the brown and cream instead of orange breast), and all in all an embarrassment of riches when it came to species count. That didn't quite make up for the scary observation that the populations of some of those species were shockingly low; at a rough estimate, the numbers of scaup and Canvasbacks were around 10% of what was routine a few years ago, and most of the other migratory ducks seemed down as well, though not so dramatically. Does this year's warm weather mean they have more places to go? We can hope, but not with any great confidence....

But other than that, it was a grand day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a day well worth seeing.



The Embarcadero Fountain flows again.

As this newsletter was being written, re-installation of the "Tornado" aerator at the columns was under way.

We had to buy a new motor, motor mount, underwater connector and a new outboard motor for the boat, but it was worth it.

Thanks to all you donors who made it possible.

BOATING CENTER TO CLOSE FOR CONSTRUCTION: Rebuilding the sea wall between the Boating Center the Lake along with a redesign of the parking lot will force the Boating Center (at 568 Bellevue Avenue) to close, perhaps in late 2014? Some operations will move to the Jack London Aquatic Center. Boats and even one dock will be temporarily moved to the Lake Chalet, where they will be attached to the end of the main (center) dock there. Volunteer rendezvouses and Institute educational presentations may also be impacted.

ASH TRAY INSTALLATION AT McELROY FOUNTAIN: Two stylish, outdoor ash trays have been purchased by the city and are scheduled to be installed at the historic McElroy fountain in Lakeside Park, the scene of many past cigarette butt tossings. This pilot project is paving the way for installation of more such receptacles (see notice of grant from the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club in last month's newsletter). The Institute has created an account with the supplier for this type of tray, which retails for about \$250 each. Students from St. Paul's School have been busy expanding their survey area, counting butts at park benches and along the periphery of the park to identify possible future installation sites. The days of having no where to toss them are slowly coming to an end.

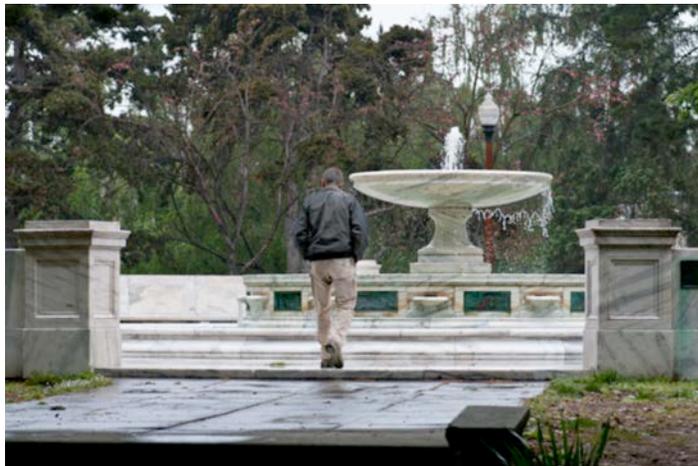


Photo by John Kirkmire

BELLEVUE AVENUE PROJECT: This DD project will include Bellevue Avenue pavement improvements, restriping, handicap parking upgrades, changes to a one-lane configuration with diagonal parking on one side and parallel parking on the other, a dedicated bike lane, replacement of 31 parking spaces lost in the Sailboat House project, and a new overflow parking area. The design is now at 65% and the project will be timed follow the Sailboat House project completion, likely going to bid in four to five months. *(from the minutes of the Measure DD Community Coalition Meeting).*

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE



Photo from Joel Peter

Many thanks to the "Weed Warriors" who removed several years of green growth from around our "U-Clean-It" station by the Cameron Stanford House.

To become a Weed Warrior, please contact Jennie Gerard at jgerard@oaklandnet.com or 510.238.7023. They usually work from 9 – noon on the last Saturday of the month.

This edition of "Tidings" was published entirely with private funding donated to the Lake Merritt Institute, and not with funds from the City of Oakland. To contribute to the Institute, use PayPal at our website or send a check to: The Lake Merritt Institute, 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610.