MUDDY WATERS: No, this is not about a musician. If you see muddy waters in the Lake, it is a temporary condition due to dredging done to facilitate preliminary stages of removal of the 12th street culverts. Full removal of the culverts will take place during August and may continue into September. The 12th street culvert removal will ultimately improve tidal exchange and, thereby, Lake Merritt water quality. When finished, the outlet will be a bit lower, allowing more of the Lake to drain at low tide. Removal of this bottleneck will also improve flood control since the water will be able to flow out faster.

Silt curtains have been installed to minimize the spread of sediment during dredging.

Photo by Erik Niemann - Photography

WILD OAKLAND: The mission of Wild Oakland is to provide free, Oakland-centered environmental education. To do this, they are sponsoring monthly field presentations at Lake Merritt. These events will be for adults as well as children so come on out and join the fun. For details on upcoming walks, visit www.wildoakland.org. On Saturday, August 11th from 12 – 2 pm, their topic will be:

Squirrels of Lake Merritt
Presented by Lila Talcott-Travis from Yggdrasil Urban Wildlife Rescue

“Pity the poor tree squirrel. Throughout history, it has rarely been the object of much attention. Ignored both as a heroic beast and as despicable vermin, the squirrel has inspired few myths, poems, or art. What can be the reason?… Perhaps because they are so common, they are overlooked… Whatever the reason, there is much to ponder about the family of squirrels, from their unique tails to their evolutionary development in tune with trees such as the oak and pine.”

Quoted from: Squirrels: A Wildlife Handbook by Kim Long
In Greek, skia means “shadow” and oura means “tail”. Put them together and you get *Sciurus*, the genus of squirrels!

Come and learn about the shade-tails on our walk, lead by Lila Talcott-Travis, a longtime wildlife rehabber and student of squirrel morphology, natural history, and lore.

Squirrels have achieved a place of distinction in European and English family crests as a symbol of retirement or retreat into the forest, something we all probably think about living in bustling Oakland. Take a time-out from your busy life to learn about…

- Their acute sense of smell! They can smell a rotten or insect infested nut through the shell, and even find caches of nuts under the snow by sniffing them out.
- Their bushy tails! Tails are used for communication, protection from the elements, balance, warmth, and to confuse predators.
- Their evolution with trees! Squirrels and trees have been evolving together for thousands of years, and some production patterns of nuts and cones are thought to have been influenced by squirrels.
- Lots of other things you didn’t even know you wanted to know…

We’ll see you at the walk!

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**Photo copyright by John Kirkmire:** [http://www.nowandlens.com/LakeMerritt-1](http://www.nowandlens.com/LakeMerritt-1)

**BIRD COLUMN: Lake Merritt in July**

On a cool, overcast morning.... The Golden Gate Audubon 4th-Wednesday walk got off to a great start with four, count ‘em, FOUR Green Herons on the island nearest the nature center. One gave us beautiful looks along the side of the island; the others flew in to the back of the island, remaining invisible even when we scurried around past the nature center to try for a better angle. Not as great as it coulda been, but still a record number of these rare and usually shy greeny-gray birds (with bright yellow legs and cinnamon-and-cream breasts making them easy to spot). We also saw four of the other heron species often found at the lake: Great Blue Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets, and Black-crowned Night-Herons (including some fuzzy-headed though adult-sized babies of the latter).

In the channel in front of the nature center, a wild juvenile White Pelican was moseying along looking for fish - recognizable as not-Hank-the-rescue-bird by keeping both wings sleek at its sides, and as a youngster by the extensive gray-brown on the wings and neck. Hank turned up in the bird paddock to confirm the judgment.
Most of the Double-crested Cormorants have left their nests (though there were lots of both black adults and bronzy fledglings on the islands and floats), and the remainder were joined in the trees by a group of American Crows and a couple of Western Gulls. The crows and gulls seemed to be scavenging for anything eatable the cormorants might have left behind (best not to think too closely about what that might be).

![Photo by Lee Aurich](image)

The Pied-billed Grebes were back in force, still wearing their elegant black cravats, and one lone lorn black American Coot was paddling by the islands - but this was the lake at about its quietest. Even the Canada Goose population seemed way down with the annual molt migration coming to an end.

Only 28 species all told - but that also included a nice look at a female Downy Woodpecker (all black and white, with a broad white patch between the wings), and two Brown Pelicans on the floats when we returned to the cars. So it was another good day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day....

**CLIMATE CORNER:** (Excerpt from *The Last Century*, a novel in progress).

"I am the climate: Your climate: The climate for everyone who has ever lived, and whoever will live. I control every aspect of your life; the food you eat, the water you drink, the weather that affects your daily life”.

“I am powerful: Stronger than your atomic bombs, your political institutions and your religious beliefs. I care not about you, your farms or cities, your puny public works or the suffering that I may inflict upon you. I am controlled by the laws of physics, which you may understand, but which you may not change. I am subject to many influences, but the levels of carbon you have placed in the air now overwhelm the other, more natural influences. They have made me more intense, variable and unpredictable. I am like a drunken weatherman, wandering between hurricanes, drought, floods, heat waves and icy storms. You may witness my wanderings, but you may not control me. I am the climate. Your ignorance of me and your disregard of my power have inflamed me.”
“Beware.”

If you want to know how the climate is getting so powerful, who is making it that way and why they will keep on making it worse, read *Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math*, Bill McKibben’s July essay in Rolling Stone magazine ([act.350.org/signup/reckoning](act.350.org/signup/reckoning)).

This may simply be the most important essay you have ever read.

**SECRET LIFE OF PLANKTON SELECTED AS FINALIST AT BLUE OCEAN FILM FESTIVAL:**

Check out the six minute film derived from Plankton Chronicles done by authors Tierney Thys, Noe Sardet and Sharif Mirshak for TED ed:


Seen by more than 50,000 people on TED and Youtube sites since April, the film has been selected as a finalist at the Blue Ocean Film Festival: [http://www.blueoceanfilmfestival.org/film_festival.htm](http://www.blueoceanfilmfestival.org/film_festival.htm)

**RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE** (Editors Note: The Institute receives many offers of support from accomplished artists and photographers. While we cannot publish them all, we do appreciate their great work and will try to include images whenever we can).

*It doesn’t have to be this way and this Snowy Egret should not have to contend with litterbug leavings while searching for dinner. So come on out and help us clean the Lake.*

*Photo copyright by John Kirkmire: [http://www.nowandlens.com/LakeMerritt-1](http://www.nowandlens.com/LakeMerritt-1)*

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