10,460 CIGARETTE BUTTS REMOVED FROM LAKESIDE PARK
ARE YOU EVER MORE THAN 100 FEET FROM A CIGARETTE BUTT?

Despite removal of 10,460 cigarette butts from Lakeside Park on Creek-to-Bay Day by four teams of volunteers (great job, thanks guys) data from St. Paul’s sixth grade students reminds us that cigarette butts are a renewable source of pollution. As part of a class project, in a 20 minute period, 12 St. Paul’s students recently removed more than 1,000 butts from about 2.5 blocks along Grand Avenue near Lakeside Park. One week later, over 900 butts were picked up from the same area by a dozen students in the same amount of time! The answer would seem to be outdoor ash trays, but since they have no smoking policies, both AC transit and Oakland Parks and Recreation do not allow ash trays at bus stops or in Lakeside Park. So despite picking most of them up on Creek to Bay Day, you can bet that thousands of butts are out there again now. Only by frequent clean ups can our Lake and the Lakeside Park environment be kept at status quo, not pristine, but not overwhelmed by trash.

It would seem then, that continual removal of cigarette butts by volunteers is a losing proposition. And that is why, if individuals will fund them, the Institute will work to install outdoor ash trays at businesses along Grand and Lakeshore avenues. So if you are tired of seeing butts everywhere along Grand and Lakeshore Avenues, send your ash tray contributions to the Institute at the above address or at our website via Paypal.

Why Creek to Bay Day Can’t Keep the Lake Clean: Sixty nine stalwart volunteers braved predicted rain to give their time for Lake Merritt. They use nets to capture 34 bags of wayward trash, painted several of our “U-Clean-It” stations, pulled three cubic yards of weeds at the new channel marsh and picked up 10,460 cigarette butts from walkways etc. around the Lake. Although the rain began in earnest at about 10 am, many stayed until the event ended at noon. Free, re-usable bags were distributed and a good, if soggy, time was had by all.

However, by late afternoon, about one third of an inch of rain fell, the first flush of the season. Down the seven square mile watershed it came, carrying with it a summer’s accumulation (except where it had been picked up) of cigarette butts, plastic everythings, paper, bottles, cans, wrappers etc. etc. etc. Within hours, the Lake was far dirtier than it had been before and after the event. This is why single, large scale events are not the way to keep Lake Merritt clean. Despite an enormous investment of time and money to organize the event (which detracts from our everyday operations) the nature of how trash enters the Lake overwhelmed the one day efforts.

That is why the Institute sponsors clean ups five days a week during the rainy season. We do this because cleaning the Lake is not like mopping the floor (do it once and it is clean). Only by having frequent trash collections can the highly mobile trash be kept under control. Yes, you can clean an area of shoreline well, but within hours, trash that had been washed up the storm drains by incoming tide can re-emerge at low tide to join floating flotsam from offshore to be deposited on your no longer clean shoreline. We see this every time we clean up and that is why it takes several days or longer after a rain to remove most of the trash.
The quiz question - take home answer to this is: Volunteer weekly (or whenever you can) when it rains.

CLIMATE CORNER: – Quotes from recently published articles:

  “If you look beyond the tables and charts and graphs that fill the (IPCC) reports, you can see
  the Arctic vanishing, great cities like Miami and Shanghai drowning, droughts causing famine
  in Africa, and millions of refugees fleeing climate-related catastrophes.”

  “Most of the world doesn’t have an issue with denial of climate change. It’s only an issue in
  Australia, Canada and, most significantly, the United States.”

  “In fact, since the 1950’s, each successive decade has been hotter than the last, and the 2000’s
  were the hottest decade since modern record-keeping began in 1880.”

  “…under Tillerson (CEO, ExxonMobil) the company has contributed millions to distorting
  public knowledge and understanding of climate science.”

• The New York Times.
  “Babies being born now could live to see the early stages of a global calamity.”

• The New Yorker, September 16, 2013. The President and the Pipeline.
  “Phase-out of emissions from coal is itself an enormous challenge,” Hansen wrote. “However,
  if the tar sands are thrown into the mix, it is essentially game over.” If the carbon locked
  underground in Alberta is exploited, he insisted, there is no chance of preventing runaway
  global warming.

• National Geographic, September, 2013. Rising Seas.
  “Since 1900 global sea level has risen about eight inches. It’s now rising at about an eighth of
  an inch a year—and accelerating.

Editors note: Sea level rise is irreversible; a one way street up.
BANDSTAND FOUNTAIN DIES: Despite spending thousands of dollars in vain attempts to re-start the bandstand fountain, it is now apparent that the motor, which runs fine on land, is the problem and would likely have to be replaced. The anticipated cost of about $3,000 or more for cleaning, packing, shipping, repair or replacement, return shipping and administrative costs, it is currently beyond the financial capability of the Institute. In addition, the manufacturer informed us that, because of “chemicals” in the Lake, motor warranties may no longer be granted. Recall now that we replaced the 18th Street fountain several months ago because the propeller had fallen off the motor shaft after only about seven months of operation. Since the propeller cannot be re-attached except at the factory in IL, and since we have had this same problem several times in the past, that fountain was replaced with a unit from a different manufacturer at a cost of $8,000. It is now obvious to us that continued repair of fountains from our original source is like putting money into a hole in the Lake. Money for the new fountain was from an unexpected, one time donation. Our previous source of fountain funds is no longer able to continue subsidizing them. If an additional $8,000 can be found for a new fountain for the bandstand, the waters will flow there again. Until then, there will no fountain at the bandstand beach.

BIRD COLUMN: A HINT OF FALL BIRD ACTION AT LAKE MERRITT
Golden Gate Audubon’s 4th-Wednesday walk began with the spirited fly-by of a female Belted Kingfisher; she vocalized with her rattling cry just to be sure that everyone saw her well, then perched on a dead tree on one of the islands for clear looks. The Double-crested Cormorant nests on the islands are finally empty, but the floats were full of mature and immature cormorants, some with their wings spread to dry.

Hank-the-rescue-Pelican still had a few friends loafing with him on one of the islands. There are now several dozen Pied-billed Grebes at the lake, but they were joined today by three Eared Grebes. The Eared Grebes dove continuously, making it hard to point out the “dirty” necks that distinguish them from the similar Horned Grebes.

A Pacific coast flycatcher was seen on September 25th during the monthly bird walk.

Photo by Lee Aurich
A Great Egret and a Snowy Egret (smaller, with yellow feet and a dark bill) foraged conveniently close by to give a good size and field mark comparison. The immature Black-crowned Night Herons seemed to outnumber the adults, but perhaps the adults were roosting further back in the bushes after a good night’s feed.

Near Children’s Fairyland we found our Bird of the Day: a Townsend’s Warbler. It has a brilliant yellow face with a black mask that is quite striking. It was very hard to see due to the way it moves so quickly through the trees, gleaning insects. Also along the fence by Children’s Fairyland we were amazed to see a pair of Bewick’s Wrens with their bold white eye stripe and delicately barred undertails out in full view. Normally they skulk in dense bushes and reveal their location only with their buzzy calls.

Across the street in the garden we found a decent number of White-crowned Sparrows. In all, we found 32 species today despite finding no Lesser Goldfinches or House Finches. As usual, it was a beautiful day at Lake Merritt.

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE

A fleeting flurry of reflections and feathers. Photo by Lee Aurich

Someone called 911 to report a “crocodile” in the Lake.

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