

The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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

Creek to Bay Day, 2015 – By Constance Taylor

On September 19, Lake Merritt got quite the deep-clean as 62 volunteers contributed over 185 volunteer hours to remove 38 bags of trash from Channel Park and the waters of our urban estuary. “In all, we removed around 3 tons of trash from the lake that day!” said Lake Merritt Institute Co-Director Carl Bailey. Much of the cleanup focused on the homeless encampments near the channel, where refuse accumulates quickly and then gets washed or blown into the water.

Oakland's Creek to Bay Day is part of California Coastal Cleanup Day and International Coastal Cleanup Day, one of the largest volunteer days in the world. California Coastal Cleanup Day was first organized in 1985 after the California Coastal Commission was inspired by the efforts Judie Neilson, an Oregon resident who organized the first Coastal Cleanup Day in 1984. Judie's efforts resulted in 2,800 volunteers cleaning up the beaches in Oregon, and California decided to use her model to start their own volunteer coastal cleanup day. Later, the Ocean Conservancy started the International Coastal Cleanup Day, which has since spread to 91 countries. In 1993 the California Coastal Cleanup Day won the Guinness Book of World Records distinction of “Largest Garbage Collection Ever Organized”, with 50,405 volunteers!



Volunteers take out the trash! Photo: Dr. Richard Bailey



Photo: Jesse Meade

While one can certainly argue that every day should be coastal cleanup day, an important aspect of doing a highly-publicized, international cleanup like this is that records of how much trash collected on this day are used to influence pollution law and policy. In fact, the results are coming in for 2015! So far the global totals on www.oceanconservancy.org show that 561,895 volunteers participated by picking up 16,186,759 pounds of trash and cleaning over 13,360 miles of coastline. Oakland's totals so far aren't too shabby, either- locally, 1,200 volunteers removed over eight tons of trash from our creeks, shoreline and streets!

“We don't usually get lots of trash in the lake in September because it doesn't rain as much,” mentioned Bailey. It's something to keep in mind as we enter the winter season- as rain comes down the storm drains, trash that has accumulated gets washed down into the lake, usually resulting in lots of debris in the water after a storm. So if you missed Creek to Bay Day, don't worry- there are plenty of opportunities to help clean the lake, especially with the winter rains coming.

The Lake Merritt Institute has weekly volunteer cleanup events every Tuesday at 10:30 am and every Saturday at 10:00 am. Additionally, there are U-Clean-It boxes around the lake if you're feeling inspired... let's make every day Creek to Bay Day!

BIRD COLUMN: Busy Day at Lake Merritt - By Hilary Powers

The first fall migrants were back at the lake for the September 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk, though the main influx of ducks hadn't started. American Coots were out in force, back from their local breeding ponds and rivaling the departing Double-Crested Cormorants for numbers, and the flotilla of Pied-billed Grebes had a couple of early-arriving Eared Grebes for competition. Many cormorants were still on the nests in the trees, but it looked like almost all were late fledglings sticking around the home place and trying to ignore the Western Gulls hanging about the nests and looking for what they could scavenge. Many of the fledglings have left already, and we saw one on its way out: high in the sky over Children's Fairyland, what looked like a soaring hawk turned out to be a juvenile cormorant circling for altitude, apparently looking over the world for a new home- this is only the second time we've seen this, but it's startling in that it's absolutely different from the cormorants' usual businesslike here-to-there flight patterns.



Double-Crested Cormorant. Photo: Lee Aurich

A passing stroller stopped to ask what kind of bird looked like a pelican, only black. “Black?” says I; “Really really black? Or sort of dark dusty brown?” “I’m male,” the stroller replied, “so my color sense is deficient. I thought it was black, with a sort of white belly.” I explained that it was most likely a juvenile Brown Pelican, as they’re a uniform dust-color except for the pale belly, and added that if it was a true glossy black like a cormorant, it would be an astonishing rare-bird sighting as nothing with a pelican’s bill should be that color. Later we found what was probably the very bird, on the dock near the beach behind Children’s Fairyland: a juvenile pelican facing away from us, in light that did make the head and neck look unusually dark – but not black to a female eye. It had several white-headed adults for company, clustered together and far from the American White Pelicans hanging out with Hank-the-rescue-bird in the paddock by the nature center.

Over in the park we were treated to some unusually lovely views of Western Bluebirds (new residents, seen here first in 2013), plus first-of-season peeks at a Warbling Vireo (anonymous gray and yellowish buff with a faint white eyebrow) and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (khaki olive, white wing bars and eye ring, generally moving too fast for a good look). A Western Scrub Jay surveyed the garden from the top of a dying pine tree, and a Bewick’s Wren displayed its curved beak, perky tail, and bright white eyebrow over by one of the gates to the bowling green – an unusual spot to see it.

The species count was a respectable 35, and the group — including many from the GGAS MeetUp page — had the usual good day at Lake Merritt, where every day....

CLIMATE CORNER – By Dr. Richard Bailey

Now, a REAL Climate Corner! Located at the bar, at Bacheesos Mediterranean restaurant (right across from the entrance to Lakeside Park on Grand Avenue) is a hideaway where you can watch entertaining and educational climate videos while sampling the cuisine or your favorite beverage. A marriage of climate education and food; what could be better? How is this possible? Through the semi-modern miracle of a DVD player which will be loaded with a changing selection of stories; videos that teach us what we must learn to navigate our future on a climate-troubled planet.



Beautiful Bacheesos Restaurant, right across the street from Lakeside Park!

Photo: Storey Photography

Now playing: *Extreme Realities - Severe Weather, Climate Change, and Our National Security*, part of the Public Television Series “Journey to Planet Earth.” Narrated by Matt Damon, this timely (read anything about refugees lately?) documentary provides little known insights into the relationship between climate change, and wars in the Middle East and Africa. If you think that drought, famine, war and refugees are unrelated, watch this video. Coming soon, episodes from the Emmy award winning series *Years of Living Dangerously*.

Coming soon, episodes from the Emmy

Why a Climate Corner? For too long, climate activists have been preaching to the choir, when they should have been communicating with man and woman on the street (e.g. Grand Avenue). If we are to limit the impacts of climate disruption, all of us, even Joe Plumber, must know why the climate is changing, and what we can do to prevent run-away transformations that threaten our children, and their children, for generations to come.

What else? The Climate Corner will also feature “Bacheesos Presents,” occasional presentations by prominent citizens. Leading off will be Peter G. Joseph, M.D. who leads the Marin County Citizens’ Climate Lobby group, and is co-author of *The Little Engine That Could: Carbon Fee and Dividend*, which was the winner of the 2014 MIT Climate CoLab contest for a U.S. Carbon Price. Dr. Joseph’s topic will be *Harness the Economy to Restore the Climate – Make the Market Work for our Survival*. So mark your calendars for 6pm on Thursday, October 22nd. Dinner will be served outside, and beverages will be served inside during the presentation. This event is sponsored by Bacheesos, the Citizens’ Climate Lobby, and the Climate Museum Project.

In addition, for those of you seeking further knowledge, the corner will feature copies of book covers relating to current climate topics, such as El Nino, refugees, religion, drought, politics, etc. Featured with this month’s video is *Tropic of Chaos – Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* by Christian Parenti. So stop by, order a drink, put on the headphones, and turn on the DVD player. You will be surprised by what you learn.

Species Profile: California Bat Ray (*Myliobatis californica*)- By Constance Taylor

Everyone loves a bat ray! You may have been lucky enough to see these animals swimming in Lake Merritt and the channel. Named for their two pectoral fins that allow them to “fly” through the water, these marine animals mostly live in bays that have muddy or sandy bottoms, but can also be found close to coral reefs and in kelp forests. They’re also native Californians, endemic to the eastern Pacific from northern Oregon all the way down to the coast of Baja. Elkhorn Slough, less than 100 miles south of Lake Merritt, is a significant nursery and feeding area for bat rays during breeding season.



Bat rays swimming in Lake Merritt on Creek to Bay Day, 2015! Photo: Carrie Voldengen

The gestation period for bat rays is surprisingly long- usually 9 to 12 months! The mother gives live birth to 2 to 12 pups, which will pop out of her tail-first with their pectoral fins rolled around their bodies. Though bat rays have a venomous tail spine from birth, the spine on the newborn is flexible and covered with protective sheath so as not to damage the birthing canal on their way out. After a few days, the sheath will fall off and the spine will harden. Throughout their life, the tail spine is used only for protection when attacked- bat rays are considered very docile and non-aggressive. These gentle fish can also live a long time; though their average lifespan in the wild is not well known, captive bat rays can live for up to 24 years!

Bat rays use their fins not only to swim, but also to find food by waving them over silty ground to stir up everything from clams to crabs to fish eggs. They also help other animals find food- as they're waving their fins or using their blunt noses to dig prey out of the mud, enough flotsam gets stirred up that fish and other critters will be able to catch some dinner as well. While looking for prey, bat rays have been known to dig trenches up to 13 feet long and 8 inches deep! That's an impressive rut, considering they dig it with their face.

Bat rays are opportunistic feeders and will eat mostly what they find, but their teeth are specialized to crush clams, crabs, and oysters. They have hardened, fused plates that grind together to smash hard shells- the broken pieces are then spit out, and the squishy inside of the mollusk or crustacean is consumed. If one of their tooth plates cracks or falls out they have a conveyor belt of new teeth to replace it, just like their cousin the shark.



Bat ray dental plates. Photo: D. Ross Robertson

So keep your eyes peeled when you're walking around Lake Merritt- you might see one of these amazing animals flying in the water next to you!

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