THUMB YOUR NOSE AT THE TAX MAN: It’s that time again; income taxes will soon be due. But if you donate to the Lake Merritt Institute, a 501C3 non-profit corporation, you can lower the amount you owe. Who would you rather pay, the Institute that takes care of your Lake, or the IRS? Contributions are deductible to the fullest extent of the law, and will be used to further the mission of the Institute, including coordination of volunteers to remove trash, maintenance of the aeration fountains, providing educational presentations, support for improvement projects, our monthly newsletter, website and bulletin boards.

LAKE MERRITT WILDLIFE – a visual guide: If a tax break is not enough to make you donate to the Institute, try this. Donors of $50 or more will receive the new, beautiful, 20 page guide to Lake Merritt Wildlife, including 57 color photos of birds and 19 photos of insects and squirrels. This is a one time fund raising project (not a membership drive) to raise money for the annual Christmas display, ash trays, fountain maintenance and other projects that benefit the creatures that call Lake Merritt their home. Each booklet will be signed by Dr. Bailey of the Lake Merritt Institute.

Have you ever wondered which bird looked back at you from the Lake? Now you can find out by matching it to the color photo in the Guide. The copyrighted photographs are by John Kirkmire, a local artist and author. Just in time for Christmas, it would make someone an ideal present.

To obtain your copy, send $50 or more to: Lake Merritt Institute, 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610.

This seagull says “Thank You!”

CLIMATE CORNER: An excellent source of information about sea level rise and climate change can be found at John Englander’s blog: http://johnenglander.net. Taken from recent posts, here are a few pearls of wisdom to worry about.

- The typical weather patterns of the last few centuries are largely gone. The gradually (or not so gradually) warming temperatures have destabilized our climate.
- Moisture in the atmosphere will increase, coming down as record rain and snow events.
- Sea level will get ever-higher due to the shrinking glaciers, the ice sheets on Greenland and Antarctica, and the thermal expansion of seawater. Higher sea level will push the shoreline inland, will extend the impact of extreme high tide ("King Tides"), and will elevate the damage of any given storm.
- In more than a year of public speaking and consulting about rising sea level, the most frequent question I get is, "How high will it get by 2050?" -- or some variation focusing on the year 2100, the person's lifetime, etc. It is asked by corporations, individuals, and community leaders. Though perfectly reasonable, I believe it is the wrong question for two entirely different reasons.

**First**, we have to recognize that it is the combination of slowly rising sea level, extreme tides, and possible storm surge that all combine to put particular property at risk. The difference is that sea level will not go down for at least a thousand years, so is special in that it takes the land away, effectively permanently. But the slow effect of rising sea level also boosts the impact of extreme high tides and the rather random storm events with which we are familiar. It is the **COMBINED** effect of storms, tides, and sea level rise that undermines property value.

The **second** reason that asking how high the sea will get this century is misleading is that we cannot possibly know for sure how high it will get by a specific year far in the future. We cannot know exactly how
much ice will melt and how much thermal expansion will occur in the coming decades, because NO ONE KNOWS how much heat we are going to put into the Earth system in the next 87 years. That will be determined by our population levels, energy demand, and how we make our energy.

Editor’s note: Populations levels, energy demand and greenhouse gas levels are all rising rapidly, and are expected to continue to do so. Only massive, world-wide political/economic shifts will result in a leveling off of energy demand and greenhouse gas levels.

BIRD COLUMN - Giving Thanks for Birds a Day Early: The regular 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon bird walk was back to the day before Thanksgiving this year, well-attended as ever. We had our first 50+-species day of the season, even without a glimpse of the three rarer migratory ducks often seen at this season (Tufted, Ring-necked, and Redhead, if you're counting). One big consolation: an Oak about 2/3 of the way from the Nature Center to El Embarcadero that was absolutely jumping with little birds, including the rarely seen (here) Wilson's Warbler (bright yellow with black cap) and even more rarely seen Black-throated Gray Warbler -- looking like the burglar-masked Townsend's Warbler (also present) with the bright yellow replaced by a gray so pale as to look quite white.

Almost all the more common regular winter visitors were crowding the lake: lots of scaup (the males with black heads and gray backs, but most with a lot of brown mixed in the white on their wings; the females brown with big white patches around their bills), some Canvasbacks with their ski-jump forehead-to-bill-tip profiles, and several Common Goldeneyes, recognizable by the disk-shaped spot on each cheek. (No crescent-marked Barrow's Goldeneyes, we were sorry to find, though they've been seen in the area.) Hank-the-rescue-pelican still had a couple of snow-white companions, though they're usually gone by November, and we saw two Brown Pelicans as well.

A dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk was perched on the art-deco brick building beside the lake, moving from corner to corner and generally showing off its unusual coloring. Red-tails can be anywhere from palest cream with cinnamon trim to almost black, but the extremes are scarce -- and this was a dark reddish brown in all the parts where a normal midrange bird is nearly white.

The female Kingfisher (blue and white, with a rust-colored cummerbund) spent several minutes on a branch trying to smash a large fish into swallowability, and a young Cooper's Hawk was lurking in a cormorant nest on one of the islands -- being utterly ignored by the vast flock of Double-crested Cormorants (hundreds of them, mostly bronze juveniles) that were crowding the trees and the shores and the floats for some reason. (We always see a few in November, but this looked like every bird hatched here from early spring through late summer had returned for a visit.)

All in all and even without the expected rarities, we couldn't have asked for a better day at the lake, where every day....

THE OUTDOOR ASH TRAY PROJECT

- Kudos to St. Paul’s students who gave a spectacular presentation at the Bay Area Trash Summit, held November 15th in San Jose. Their multimedia show, part of the “Tobacco Product Litter” session, received a standing ovation from the 300+ in attendance. Under the tutelage of Christine Fairless and Susan Porter (faculty at St. Paul’s) the students designed public service announcements, and collected / counted thousands of cigarette butts in and around Lake Merritt. Their work has galvanized others to approve installation of ash trays at the historic McElroy fountain in Lakeside Park.
• Ash trays approved for McElroy fountain area - a hotspot for butts: A stylish design (shown here) has been ordered and will hopefully arrive by mid-December. Thanks to Rebecca Tuden, Barbara Schaaf and Oakland Parks and Recreation for getting it done.

• Institute applies for grants: Grant applications have been submitted to the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club and Keep Oakland Beautiful for the purchase and installation of outdoor ash trays. We eagerly await their decisions.

TIDE LEVEL RECORDER UNDER CONSIDERATION: Every day, microwave signals depicting the tide level at Lake Merritt are sent from the Boating Center dock to the County flood control station. Because the city of Oakland has no way of recording tide height at the Lake without making a special request for outdated, weekly paper tide charts, the city is currently determining if Measure DD funds can be used to purchase a tide recorder, which can intercept the county signal and provide digital, 24/7 tide level data. If oxygen and other sensors were also purchased, this data could also be recorded. The Institute supports this vital project, one which is necessary to determine if the Lake meets state standards for oxygen, and if Lake Merritt can ultimately be removed from the EPA list of impaired water bodies. We anticipate receiving a price quote for the recorder and sensors within the next few weeks.

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE

6,776 Cigarette Butts Were Found Last Year!

St. Paul’s students made this poster. A slide show of their work can be found at: http://www.sanjoseca.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/2166

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