

# THE TIDINGS



LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

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"The Tidings" is an editorial newsletter. Posted opinions are not necessarily those of the City of Oakland

## Exotic Visitors and Old Friends Meet at the Lake Merritt BioBlitz



A quarter-inch nudibranch, *Okenia pana*, Photo by K.Noonan

A bit smaller than last year's grand event, the Lake Merritt BioBlitz of April 2019 swapped scale for sweetness, new discoveries and unprecedented collaboration among local natural history enthusiasts.

The event marked the first community natural history event at the newly re-opened Rotary Nature Center (closed from March 17<sup>th</sup>

2017 to February 16<sup>th</sup> 2019). Damon Tighe of the California Center for Natural History (CCNH) and Sarah Seiter, Assistant Natural History Curator at the Oakland Museum (OMCA), worked with Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development (OPY&RD) to bring this

California Academy of Sciences program to the shores of Lake Merritt. Participating organizations included the Community for Lake Merritt, Merritt College Microscopy Department, Rotary Nature Center Friends and of course, the Lake Merritt Institute! See photos in the email edition of The Tidings.



BioBlitz organizers Damon Tighe of CCNH and Sarah Seiter of OMCA; photo by David Wofford

**One highlight** was the tiny nudibranch (above left) identified as *Okenia plana*. A Japanese sea slug first reported in the Bay in 1960, it feeds on the numerous bryozoans in the estuary. It has been seen throughout San Francisco Bay as far upstream as Suisun Bay, but possibly never before in Lake Merritt! Spring rains have caused the Bay and Lake Merritt to be unusually fresh for a prolonged period this year. Some organisms can't tolerate that. As a consequence, SFSU scientists had to go to Half Moon Bay on the coast to collect organisms that are normally in the Bay for their Ocean Discovery Day displays on April 28th. According to one biologist, visiting Lake Merritt a few weeks ago, aquatic animal life appeared "extremely depleted."

Hank-the-disabled-pelican (right), who is often seen in the bird yard outside the Rotary Nature Center was the most "Observed" organism in the BioBlitz. Hank was placed at Lake Merritt by the Department of Fish and Wildlife in 2004 because she (yes, she) can't fly. Her story became the inspiration for LMI Director James Robinson's children's books, *A Bird's Tale I and II*. No one knows exactly how old she is but estimates are between 16 and 20 years old. American White Pelicans can live up to 30 years in the wild. (...continued on pg. 2)



Photo by Damon Tighe

**LMI in APRIL:** 2,160 lbs. of trash were removed from the lake in April and 8,500 lbs. so far in 2019. LMI Director James Robinson and Staff hosted 259 volunteers, made 4 educational presentations and attended 1 meetings. 0.20" inches rain was recorded by LMI rain gauge.

(BioBlitz continued from pg.1... )

The die-off of mussels, clams and other invertebrates is normal, part of seasonal change, “A Year in the Life” of Lake Merritt described by Dr. Richard Bailey, founder of LMI. The critters including big fish Hank likes to eat will return to her favorite haunts when the water becomes more saline (salty) in the summer and fall.



Pelicans usually hunt as a group; iNaturalist

In all, the BioBlitz 2019 found 169 species living in and around the lake, 20 of them part of the aquatic community (see list in email Tidings). Nearly all of these were non-native species. The City Nature Challenge competition between world cities was won by Capetown, South Africa. However, the San Francisco Bay Area came in first for numbers of observations, and fourth for numbers of species and numbers of people-- still ahead of our arch-rival Los Angeles.

## eSCOOTER MADNESS CONTINUES

Scooter pollution is on the rise again. Eleven scooters were spotted in Lake Merritt by LMI’s Clean Lake Program on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. The eScooter companies were notified, but four of the scooters remained in the water at end of day. According to Professor David Cwiertny, Director of the University of Iowa’s Center for Health Effects of Environmental Contamination, “Dozens of scooters regularly being thrown into a lake is certainly going to be incredibly disruptive to ecosystems.” Rechargeable lithium ion batteries that power the scooters commonly contain nickel which can leach out into the environment over time. The Environmental Protection Agency warns that in high concentrations, nickel is a dangerous pollutant for aquatic life.

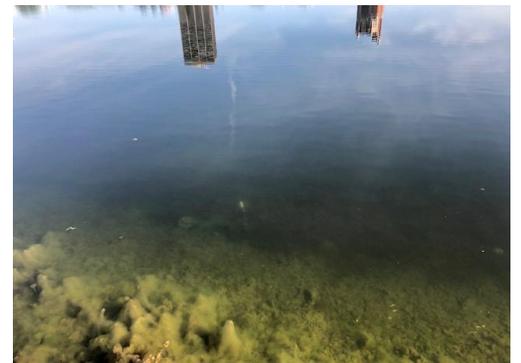
LMI’s director James Robinson expressed an additional concern to the City’s Shared Mobility Director: “Several of the scooters have been in the lake, so long that the marine growth has totally covered them with a thick film; this indicates the scooters have been in the lake for days or even weeks. It is algae season now, and organic growth in the lake is at an all-time high. At some point, the marine growth will completely cover the scooter making it impossible to find (see photos below).



A: Newly abandoned scooters - How many do you see?

What can be done? These options need to be considered by city Council.

- **Licensing agreements** for the companies. A company could lose its license if its product regularly ended up in the lake.
- **Fines:** The City of Novato applies fines to control abandoned shopping carts. Fines could be levied **per scooter not removed in a timely fashion** from the lake.
- **Incentivize private ownership** of eScooters. Riders will take care of the scooters they own. Rather than a strictly shared dockless format, companies could offer a combination of the two models to promote responsible parking of eScooters.



B:How many scooters here? Not so easy to find when overgrown with algae. Answers below.

## THANK YOU TO OUR APRIL VOLUNTEERS!

Volunteer groups in April included Bentley High School, UC Berkeley (Energy & Clean Tech Law), Sunny Micro-School, Baby List Inc., University Redlands, International Community School, Our U-Clean-It self-organized teams, and the LMI A-TEAM regulars. We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job! See photos in the email edition of The Tidings.

LOVE YOUR LAKE! .... 

ANSWERS: A : Two. B : There were four.

## Summer Strikes Early at the Lake - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon Society



Double-crested Cormorant;  
Photo by Lee Aurich

“Welcome to the June 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon Walk at Lake Merritt,” I said to the 20-odd people gathered on April 24. The sun beat down, the cormorant nests were empty, and the surface almost bare of birds. High summer indeed; it felt like I might as well have called it July.

On closer look, it wasn't that bad. A Forster's Tern (an ultra-streamlined little white bird with a black cap, not seen here for months) gobbled a fish on one of the floats, and an adult Double-crested Cormorant (with crests) sat beside a nearly white-breasted bronze fledgling on two others. (Cormorants did nest here this year – but it looks like only one cycle, down from two last years and three the year before. Seems like everybody who wanted a nest site found one somewhere when the season started, so no one had to wait for second place.) A Snowy Egret flew past the dome cage, trailing buttercup-yellow feet, and landed on the rocks by the little restoration swamp that replaced part of the boathouse parking lot.

And when we walked around the bird paddock, both adult and juvenile Black-crowned Night-Herons were cooling their toes in the fresh water, along with a Mallard drake catching the sun at a strange angle, making his head shine a clear deep blue instead of green. Hank-the-rescue-pelican strutted around the fenced work area, flapping his scar-bound wing and showing off the breeding-ready bump on his beak.

Along the lake shore – where we stayed off the path and scurried from shady tree to shady tree – we were treated to a surprising array of leftover winter migrants. No great numbers of any one kind, but perhaps a dozen Scaup, both Greater and Lesser and both black-headed drakes and brown hens, plus a couple of dozen Ruddy Ducks (the males truly ruddy at last) and three or four female Bufflehead. Two Eared Grebes showed off their copper, gold, and steel breeding plumage, and six of the large grebes – five Western and a Clark's, more than I've seen here in years – cruised through the sheltered waters between the islands and El Embarcadero. Two of the Westerns paid serious attention to one another, dipping their heads and preening each other and themselves together in a sort of dance, and we spent a few breathless minutes watching them and hoping they'd rise into a side-by-side run along the surface, but a third bird swam up and they drifted apart.

The park and garden had most of the usual residents except Chestnut-backed Chickadees, which we always expect but missed last April too for some reason. Could they be finding nest sites hard to find? They like cavities in dead branches, and the park service has been careful to get rid of deadwood to avoid injury to visitors. The Oak Titmice seem to have solved that problem – the copper street light poles tend to have holes at about lamp level, and we saw two of them with the little gray birds darting in and out. The area also had some locally uncommon birds: A European Starling (not seen in April since 2014) swaggered around the bowling green, showing off its brilliant gold bill, scarlet legs, and iridescent black breeding plumage. At the bare top of a tree across from the garden center, a pair of Brown-headed Cowbirds – the shining black male living up to the species name and the dust-pale female like a ghostly small shadow – perched as for a formal portrait, and in the sensory garden, a pair of Lesser Goldfinches enjoyed the rock fountain, the male standing alertly near the edge while the female wallowed and splashed, sending water higher than his head.



European Starling; Photo by John Kirkmire

So it turned out to be a good day (not that all days at the lake are not good in their own fashion); in fact, surprisingly after the grim start, a *very* good day, with 37 species observed – the most for April since 2015, and that was only 38 – and we wandered off happily to lunch around 12:15.

**\*\*\*AUDUBON BIRDWALKS AT THE LAKE:** Join bird expert Hilary Powers any fourth Wednesday of the month for a free “Birdwalk” at the lake. Muster at the geodesic bird cage near the Nature Center at 9:30 a.m. for what are always fascinating introductions to lake birdlife.\*\*\*

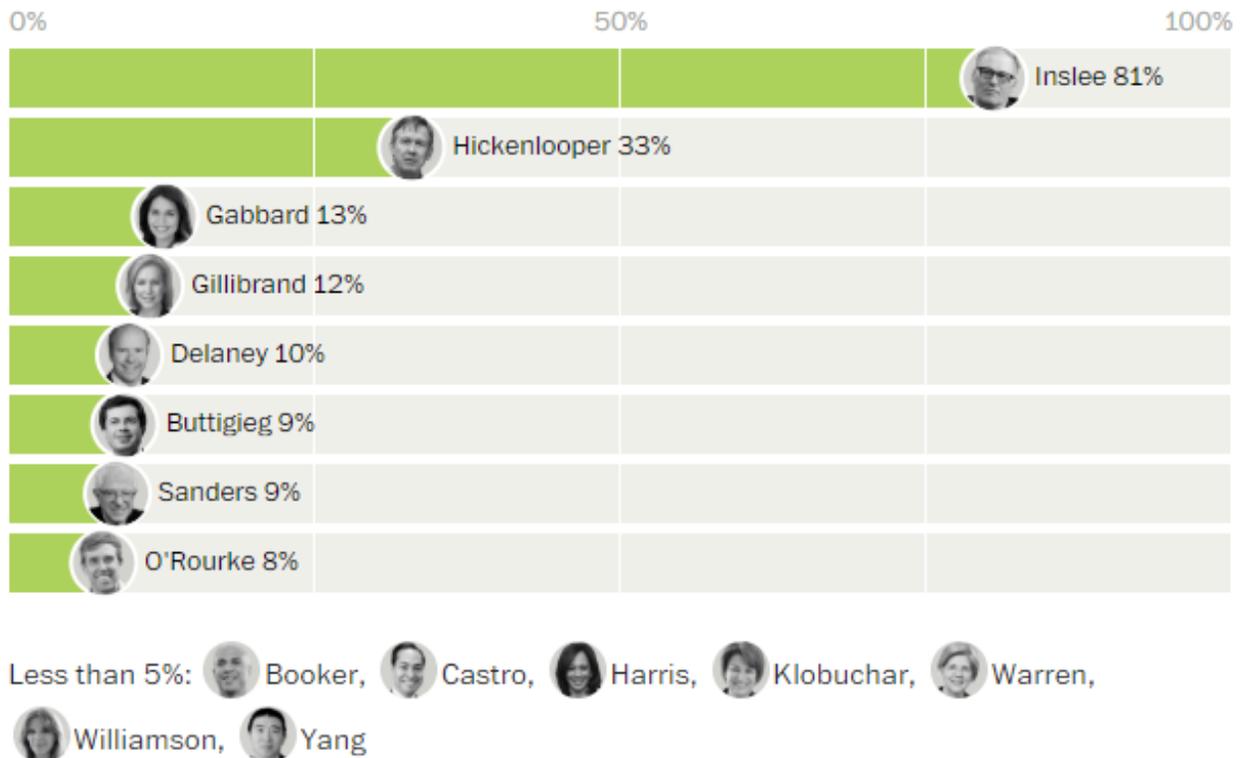
# **CLIMATE CORNER: WHAT SOME PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE SAYING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE** - A Guest Editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

Governor Jay Inslee is the only candidate who is making climate change the focal point of his campaign. You may think that is irrational, until you realize that climate strongly impacts almost every other issue you can think of. Does climate disruption affect your health? Yes; especially with regard to asthma, insect related disease, and heat exhaustion. Does climate disruption affect the economy? Yes, especially with regard to insurance rates, energy costs, the price of food, and just about everything else. Does climate disruption affect immigration? Yes, especially if you live in a country experiencing drought, collapse of a fishery, water shortages and famine (East Africa, South Sudan and Yemen). Does climate disruption impact social justice? A resounding yes, because it is the less well-off that suffer the most. This is being repeated over and over in places like Paradise, CA, New Orleans, New York City and elsewhere on the planet. Climate disruption can disrupt everything. It needs to be the quintessential issue in 2020.

This is not to say that Jay (as he prefers to be called) does not have positions on other issues. As a two-term congressman from Washington state, he has dealt with many issues that are both national and local, such as job creation, environmental protection, minimum wage, education, and justice. So, if you are interested in someone who realizes that wind generators do not cause cancer (you know who said they do) but that they do cause jobs, check out Jay Inslee.

## Who focused most on climate change

Percent of policy talk on social media about climate change



Many other candidates consider climate change to be a major issue, but aside from supporting the New Green Deal and the Paris Agreement, not enough have embraced specific solutions, or made it a major part of their campaigns.

However, given the upcoming fire season, recent bomb cyclones, current flooding in the Midwest (and who knows what is coming next) that may soon change.

Overall, most responses to question 2 (Do you support a price on carbon and how do you envision the proceeds being used?) indicates there is a lot of work to be done on giving 100% of a carbon fee back to everyone with a social security number in equal shares. This is a far better use of the funds than the technology of the day which goes away, command and control that ends up in court forever, tax reductions that are loop-holed by lawyers, or convoluted and manipulated trading games where the price is so low as to be ineffective relative to what is needed (e.g. California cap and trade, Europe, The U.S. Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative).

The biggest disappointment here is Kamala Harris, our own senator. She needs to follow the example of Barbara Lee (who is co-sponsoring the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019) and hear from constituents that want climate to be a major issue in 2020.

### Best Quotes

- “I didn’t come to Congress to argue with a thermometer.” - Florida Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz
- “We better hope it’s man-made, because if it’s not we’re in trouble” - Senator Mitt Romney said
- “It’s in your and my lifetime that (that) cost is going to be paid, one way or the other.” - Pete Buttigieg

For further details, go to <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/18/us/politics/climate-change-2020-democratic-candidates.html>



**Beautiful Vista at Bandstand Beach** – Thank you to Director James Robinson and his staff for beautifying the shoreline at Bandstand Beach. They removed the no-longer-useful fountain from the water. The fountain can no longer be used because low tides are too shallow after the opening of the Lake Merritt Channel in 2012.

**DON'T MISS PODCAST ABOUT LAKE MERRITT HISTORY AND ECOLOGY!** (link in email edition)  
**Constance Taylor**, CA Center for Natural History, EPRP Naturalist at Sunol and former Rotary Nature Center Naturalist explains the history and ecology of the lake. The Tidings Editor would add that the Bat-Ray die off of 2017 was later linked to chemicals or fungal pathogens in runoff rather than low dissolved oxygen. The tide gate structure at 7<sup>th</sup> St. was actually designed to allow bat-rays to pass. Salinity does vary widely at the lake. It can swing from 0 parts per thousand salt in the top layer during a rainstorm to more than 35 parts per thousand in late summer after months of evaporation and no rain. Prolonged periods of salinity less than 20 ppt are common in the spring. The Pacific is the freshest major ocean at ~32-33 ppt.

!

**THANK YOU TO OUR APRIL VOLUNTEERS!** We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job!

### The Lake Merritt Institute's Earth Day Community Service



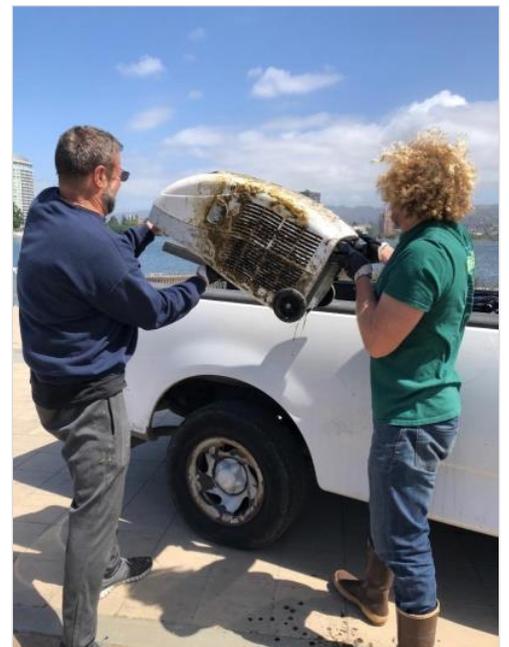
### Lake Merritt Institute's A-Team



# Bentley High School



← Air Conditioner Retrieval



University of Redlands Bulldogs



LAKE MERRITT BIOBLITZ APRIL 2019 PHOTOS



Insect Sciences Museum



Invertebrates and Plankton

Merritt College Microscopy Team



Collecting Plankton



Plankton under microscope



**Five Fish Traps set – No Fish**



**Invertebrate table**



**Viewing Plankton**



**Invertebrate table**



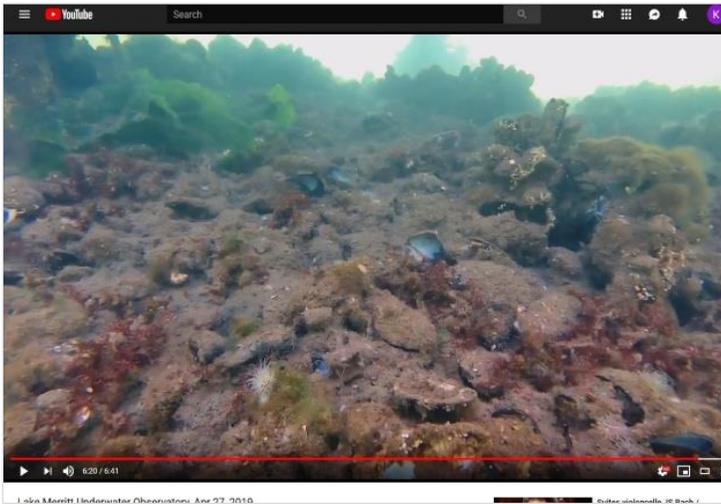
**Shading the controller screen.**



**Remotely Operated Vehicle**



**Flying the Trident ROV**



**Under the floating dock at the Lake Merritt Boating Center**



**Flying the Lake Merritt Underwater Observatory ROV**

For video click here→ <https://youtu.be/ZxKzvm2XIRO>

**2019 Lake Merritt BioBlitz** - Aquatic Invertebrates etc. Species List ID's by volunteers and KMN in field Observed on Sat 4/27, 2019 at Lake Merritt Boating Center Docks

Physical conditions: Sunny and calm, water temperature 23 degC , salinity 22 ppt; tide gate open, low tide at 1:40 pm at Oakland Inner Harbor

## **Molluscs**

### Bivalves

*Teredo navalis* – Ship's worm was found in wood of removed docks

*Mytilus galloprovincialis?* Photos taken, smooth not ribbed, all sizes

*Arcuatula senhousia*- Two very small individuals (~1 cm) in a Mytilus-muck clump

*Mya arenaria* – Many minute clams in mussel-muck clumps and inside shells of dead mussels.

### **Gastropods**

*Okenia plana* – in mussel clumps and on sea weeds attached to floating dock (3 individuals and several probable egg cases)

*Haminoea* – (4/26) Egg case only, probably *H. japonica*

*Urosalpinx cinerea*-several adults and possible egg cases

*Tritia obsoleta*-very large adults in mussel –muck clumps

## **Crustaceans**

*Palaemon macrodactylus* - Oriental shrimp. Caught in fish traps. Several carrying eggs, many small.

Corophiums

Other amphipods

Ampithoe( valida?)

*Amphibalanus amphitrite*-Red-striped barnacle

*Sphaeroma quoianum* (4/8)

**Bryozoans-** *Conopeum*-Crusts and an arborescent form overgrowing everything-similar to ones i.d.'d as *C. chesapeakeensis* in 2017

**Worms:** *Ficopomatus enigmaticus*

**Plankton:**

*Coscinodiscus*

Pennate Diatoms- Two kinds

Polychaete larvae

Copepods in various stages mostly immatures

Barnacle larvae

Something else

**Sea Weeds:** From above, you could see a very fine green sea weed I called *Cladophora* (this is possibly incorrect), *Enteromorpha*, *Ulva* sheets. ROV propellers snagged a lot of red algae that needs to be identified (uploaded to iNat as *Sacrodithia* or *Gracillaria*). I put it on paper to press and dry. There is a finely divided darker green alga attached to the floating dock I need to get a sample of. ROV video shows a more diverse algae community that you can see from above.

**Fish** – Five fish traps left in for ~24 hours most on 4/26 but two on 4/23 yielded only one fish that appears to be a *Lucania parva* or Rainwater Killifish. It died trying to squeeze through the fish trap mesh. Some observers said they saw gobies near the geodesic dome and near in Glen Echo arm, but no dates or photos. Tiny fish are numerous under *Enteromorpha* mats along shore.

4/28 USGS cruise puts salinity of SF Bay at Stations 20 and 21 (at and just south of bay bridge) at 18 ppt, temp 13 degC

<https://sfbay.wr.usgs.gov/access/wqdata/overview/wherewhen/where.html>

[https://sfbay.wr.usgs.gov/cgi-bin/sfbay/dispys/display9?cruiz=119087&onescal=off&zoom=south&cstsd=chl\\_sal\\_temp\\_spm\\_do&out=Show+Datatable](https://sfbay.wr.usgs.gov/cgi-bin/sfbay/dispys/display9?cruiz=119087&onescal=off&zoom=south&cstsd=chl_sal_temp_spm_do&out=Show+Datatable)

**YOUTH WATER QUALITY REPORT- WED May 1<sup>st</sup> at Lake Center by Growing Justice Interns from the Rose Foundation**

Dissolved Oxygen 9 ppm (good!),

pH 7

Salinity 20 ppt (LOW!)

Water Temperature 21 degrees Celsius

Water Clarity (Secchi) >1.25 meters (CLEAR)



Activity supported by San Francisco Elks Lodge 003.

## **A Letter to The Tidings Editor from Rotary Nature Center Naturalist 1961-1993**

What has really been a disaster about the Naturalist Program at the Rotary Nature Center is a no- lesser concern about the wild bird status at The Lake Merritt Wildlife Refuge, and for the domestic geese issue for that matter. Having the birds at Lake Merritt is at the heart of what the Lake Merritt Refuge is all about--what the Duck Pond and the Duck Yard and The Nature Center is all about. It used to be what the Naturalist Program feeding program was all about. The site is known as a National Federal Landmark [with plaque with that designation] as the first wildlife refuge as a protected sanctuary for wild birds.

I was employed by the City in 1961 on Paul Covel's naturalist staff, and Paul, with Director William Mott, had already established a quality plan to "Bring Nature and the People Together," and I was happy to fit right in, as an animal/bird keeper at first. The highlight of the day was an advertised, official feeding of the birds at 3:30 every day. That included milo grain--not scratch corn--fed first at the lakeside to attract migratory birds resting on the lake if it was winter, and milo also at the freshwater duck pond for waterfowl in general, that has always included mallard ducks. It was the greatest show in Oakland! Hundreds of people and thousands of birds! A bird feeder spreading milo amid that great flock of birds while Paul or another Naturalist spoke to the crowd on a portable public address system. The P.A. was also hooked up inside the Nature Center for on-the-spot lectures to groups all day long.

If some other bird had been recruited as part of the show, food was provided for it. We acquired Hector and Helen the white pelicans in the 1960's, brought to the lake from the colony at Pyramid Lake, Nevada, by the Fish and Wildlife Department, as an attraction for city folks who had never seen one. They were slightly pinioned to keep them at the lake, and became the most photographed pelicans in the world! Their popularity became terrific, and they flourished. We bought flounder and cut it up for them. Each ate about two pounds a day and were fed at 3:30, putting on quite a show for the crowd. The duo continued into the mid 1980's when Hector became entangled in a loose rope near the log boom and drowned. Helen continued on until after I retired in 1993, and then died about 1995. Stephanie had an elaborate funeral for him and then buried him on the largest island. I have been detained and have not seen the new "Hank," but it has no doubt similarities of H and H. We had switched to feeding them smelt, bought in blocks at the fish market. They did some fishing on their own when schools of herring and anchovy spawned in the lake, but the coming of white pelicans in the summer is something new as I only saw a few strays that might stay for a day.

This is just a sampling of the past, but I'm really concerned if the lack of proper attention to the birds and the nature program is neglected and the original purpose of it all becomes lost to the joy of bird lovers, photographers, students, naturalists, people, and lovers of the wild and free.

-- Rex Burress,

**Erratum:** American Crow photo from July 2017 issue of The Tidings ([https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2017\\_07\\_Newsletter.pdf](https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2017_07_Newsletter.pdf)) attributed to BJStacey was taken by Victoria Reeder, iNaturalist ([https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/victoriousness?taxon\\_id=8021](https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/victoriousness?taxon_id=8021)). Apologies to the photographer.

## **REFERENCES in May 2019 Tidings:**

BioBlitz <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/lake-merritt-bioblitz-april-2019-city-nature-challenge>

*Okenia plana* <http://invasions.si.edu/nemesis/browseDB/NEMESIS-DIST2.jsp?TSN=78423>

The Tidings May 2018, Lake Merritt Contributes to City Nature Challenge Win

Final Results 2019 <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/29625/journal/24652>

SF Bay Area in Fourth Place -

<http://citynaturechallenge.org/leaderboard-2019>

Hank the Pelican: <http://www.abirdstale.com/about-book.php>

<http://www.abirdstale.com/pictures.php> Joaquin Miller and at RNC

<https://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/bird-life-expectancy-american-white-pelican>

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American\\_White\\_Pelican/lifehistory](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_White_Pelican/lifehistory)

[https://localwiki.org/oakland/Hank\\_the\\_pelican](https://localwiki.org/oakland/Hank_the_pelican)

<https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2013/10/25/white-pelicans-flock-to-lake-merritt-wildlife-refuge-to-greet-hank/>

<https://www.facebook.com/damon.tighe/posts/10161549669045532>

Podcast about Lake Merritt by Constance Taylor –

[https://soundcloud.com/user-736747354/eby-qa-exploring-lake-merritt-and-childrens-fairyland?fbclid=IwAR1z0jmHn51-jQaTbui\\_I0xwI9wgkI2GQsk2U2ULcbNyVmlu\\_zQul26NjIw](https://soundcloud.com/user-736747354/eby-qa-exploring-lake-merritt-and-childrens-fairyland?fbclid=IwAR1z0jmHn51-jQaTbui_I0xwI9wgkI2GQsk2U2ULcbNyVmlu_zQul26NjIw)

<https://baynature.org/article/sharks-dying-san-francisco-bay/>

<https://www.livescience.com/30802-earth-ocean-saltiness-new-map.html>

eScooters

<https://www.marinij.com/2019/05/03/novato-shopping-cart-rules-help-stamp-out-blight/>

<https://www.wired.com/story/lime-scooter-gen3-design/>

<https://www.ridester.com/lime-scooters/> 250-watt motor

<https://electrek.co/2018/10/31/lime-electric-scooter-fire/> happened while charging

<https://slate.com/technology/2018/12/electric-scooter-bird-lime-lakes-rivers-environment-vandalism.html> - Nickel leaching toxic

<https://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-bird-one-scooter-model-new-20190508-story.html> 20% of users want to purchase their own scooter.

**Climate Corner:** Candidate Quotes

Florida Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz - <https://gaetz.house.gov/media/in-the-news/gop-rep-matt-gaetz-unveils-green-real-deal-conservative-answer-aoc-pet-project>

Senator Mitt Romney - <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/435328-romney-helps-gop-look-for-new-path-on-climate-change>

Pete Buttigieg - [https://www.kpcnews.com/article\\_b142d69c-c077-598d-9d1f-949e81d487e2.html](https://www.kpcnews.com/article_b142d69c-c077-598d-9d1f-949e81d487e2.html)

For further details, go to <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/18/us/politics/climate-change-2020-democratic-candidates.html>

**Please direct questions and comments to The Tidings Editor, Katie Noonan, at [ktnoon@aol.com](mailto:ktnoon@aol.com).**

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