

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

MARCH 3rd IS ELECTION DAY-Lake Merritt is counting on YOU!

Democrat? Republican? No Party Preference? Whatever! The March 3rd election isn't just about choosing a presidential candidate. Oakland voters will be deciding whether to invest in parks maintenance, help the homeless and improve water quality by voting on Measure Q. Measure Q is a parcel tax that will raise \$21 million dollars annually for parks maintenance, homeless services and water quality improvements.



Measure Q is a dollars and sense choice. The quality of Oakland's parks is “in crisis” for lack of maintenance. Parks are assets that attract visitors and businesses to our city. Helping the homeless will help parks maintenance and water quality too. Oakland Mayor Schaff points out that Oakland can be eligible for matching funds from the State to help the unsheltered people of Oakland if Measure Q passes. The City must improve Lake Merritt's water quality by 2022 or face serious regulatory fines. Measure Q will provide funds needed for effective anti-dumping measures and curbside storm drain filters used to catch hypodermic syringes that have been getting into the lake. Seniors, low-income Oaklanders, and affordable rental housing are exempted from the tax and strong accountability is provided in the form of Annual Financial Audits, City Auditors Audits, Oversight Commission, clear deliverables and a special fund. Find out more at <https://www.yesforoakland.com>.



Photo courtesy of Ana Avila

No “Sanctuary City” for a Pelican? – Hank, a disabled rescue pelican, has been a beloved mascot at the Lake Merritt Wildlife Refuge since 2004. As a youth, Hank flew into a power line up in Oregon and can't fly. She was placed here by the Fish and Wildlife Service because the Rotary Nature Center had a feeding program in place, having cared for other pelicans since the 1960's. Hank was fed fish during the winter months when her species normally leaves the lake on its migratory journey.

In April 2019, the Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development decided to stop feeding Hank at all, opining that she can feed herself and that supplementing her diet violated the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Fish and Wildlife disputes this view (see The Tidings, June 2019). Hank is currently being fed by trained volunteers until her immigration status is cleared up with the City and Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development. (See Fish & Wildlife position and essay about Hank by the late Rex Burrell, Rotary Nature Center Naturalist 1975-1993 in the email Tidings.)

LMI in JANUARY: 2,730 gallons of trash were removed from the lake in January.

*The City will henceforth measure trash in gallons not pounds.

LMI Director James Robinson and Staff hosted **144 volunteers**, made two educational presentations and attended one meeting

1.67” inches rain were recorded by LMI rain

THANK YOU TO OUR JANUARY VOLUNTEERS! Volunteer groups: **Irving High School, St. Paul's Episcopal School, Oakland Technical High School.** On MLK Day: **Oakland High, Education, Defense & Justice for Youth (EDJY), Park Day School, St. Paul's,** our **U-Clean-It** self-organized teams and the **LMI A-TEAM** regulars. We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job! See photos below.

YOU can support the Lake Merritt Institute's important work. Go to **lakemerrittinstitute.org** to find out how.

THE LAKE MERRITT CHANNEL PASSAGE and MEASURE DD PROGRESS – Interview with Kristin Hathaway, Watershed, Stormwater Division and DD Program Manager

The dream of gliding freely by canoe from Lake Merritt to the open bay inspired the writers of the Measure DD Lake Merritt Master Plan in 2002. It lives on in the imagination of many Oaklanders. However, the reality 18 years later is complicated. The Tidings Editor interviewed Kristin Hathaway, Watershed and Stormwater Division and DD Program Manager after her presentation to the Measure DD Community Coalition on January 20th.



Unauthorized kayaks on the Lake Merritt Channel in 2014

What you need to know:

Revamping the Flood Control Station to allow free tidal flow and passage of boats is a ways off.

- Alameda County Flood Control District commissioned a review by Wood-Rogers of the 7th St. Flood Control Station. The full report has not yet been received by the City. The County is prioritizing expenditures on all of its flood control infrastructure, and it is not clear that the Lake Merritt Channel facility will be chosen. Kristin Hathaway points out that matching Measure DD funding should make 7th St. an attractive investment but the City has received no sign of interest yet from the county.
- New pump station designs that would take the massive pumps and tide gates out of the channel have been discussed but not shared. How these would work with inflatable dams for example or by other means is not clear. This would be initiated by the County.

Operation of the current tide gates-protocol is to be shared:

- The Lake Merritt Institute has long asked for greater transparency and more responsiveness to local water-level conditions in operating the tide gates to improve dissolved oxygen in the lake (a regulatory enforcement requirement of NPDES permit). Kristin reports that the City is writing a protocol for operation of the gates based on its own task order report from Wood-Rogers. The finished Tidal Gate Operations Guidance will be made public.

The Lake Merritt Institute strongly recommends that the new protocols and any changes to structures and inflow/outflow from the Lake to the bay include scheduled public involvement, and multiple opportunities for comment. These changes are far too important to be decided only by county officials and consultants.

New trash booms should be completed this summer:

- The construction of the new booms funded by Measure DD are anticipated in the next couple of months. Tide-leveling anchoring devices will hold the booms in place and help capture trash exiting the outfalls.

Curbside storm drain filters are being installed along 19th St. and elsewhere at City expense as part of road upgrades using maintenance funds.

The Lake Merritt Institute heartily congratulates the City for this work, which should result in a reduction of used needles and other trash in our estuary.

Migratory Bird Season is October 1st to May 1st. It is still illegal to boat in the channel during these months of the year. Period.

Wet, Warm Wonderful Lake Merritt - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon



Red-breasted Merganser-Peggy Daly, iNaturalist

The first thing to strike the January 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon crew (aside from the new fences closing off the area between the dome cage and the lake except for a lockable but open gate) was how very much water there was. The surface looked at least three feet higher than usual... and the level was still rising: threatening to overflow by the Rotary Nature Center a bit before 10 am, and actually onto the path around 11:30 when we were heading back toward Lakeside Park.

Perhaps it was the extra water that lured in our one real lake-rarity: a handsome male Northern Shoveler sat gleaming on the edge of one of the islands like a comic caricature of a Mallard: green head, chestnut sides, flaming orange feet, and long long black Daffy Duck bill. In all the record-keeping for the trip, he was the first of his kind to appear.

The lake also had virtually all the winter regulars: all five kinds of grebe, both Greater and Lesser Scaup in substantial numbers (for this depleted age), not-ruddy Ruddy Ducks (better called Stiff-tail Ducks for now), and lots of Bufflehead. A party of nine Red-breasted Mergansers clustered in the waters below the islands, including a handsome male in full copper, green, and gray breeding plumage, and the Common Goldeneyes were out in force – unaccompanied by the rarer Barrow’s variety this time, alas.

For those willing to look at gulls (mostly birders bored with sparrows), we had several Glaucous-winged Gulls (gray backs *and* gray wingtips). They joined some of the duck-sized Western Gulls, a few smaller and yellow-legged California Gulls, and a huge flock of Ring-billed Gulls, the easiest species to identify, having (you guessed it) a clear black band around the bill.

The oaks along the park between the islands and El Embarcadero sheltered most of the birds we usually find across Bellevue and in the garden – crested gray Oak Titmice, Bushtits (also gray and much more mouse-like), typewriter-chattering Ruby-crowned Kinglets – plus a pair of Hutton’s Vireos. These vireos look so much like the kinglets that they’re tough to call by color and shape, but they have their own styles of movement. The kinglets flutter about and rarely give you a decent look, while the vireos are calmer – leading to the tongue-in-cheek “If you saw it, it was a vireo; if you didn’t, it was a kinglet.” (Except, of course, that there are *lots* more kinglets around, so it was probably a kinglet anyway.)



Green Heron; Renee Rausin, iNaturalist

Most of the rest of the forest birds turned up later, though we dipped on robins and House Finches. The prize of the last hour was a really good look at a Downy Woodpecker (one of only two dozen sightings over more than a decade) digging a nest hole at the top of a dead pine tree.

For some reason, raptors are the princes of any day list; birders greet them with delight, which is weird when you stop to think about it – they eat the rest of the objectives. It may be a simple matter of relative rarity – predators have to be less common than prey – and birders want rare; crowds headed to Fresno from the Bay Area a few years ago when a real Blue Jay showed its beak in the wrong half of the U.S. Anyway, months go by at Lake Merritt without a raptor sighting, and this trip had two: a beautiful Red-shouldered Hawk, all russet breast and black-and-white checks and stripes, circling overhead long enough for really good looks, and a rosy-breasted gray adult Cooper’s Hawk that landed in a nearby pine tree to give the group the stink eye.

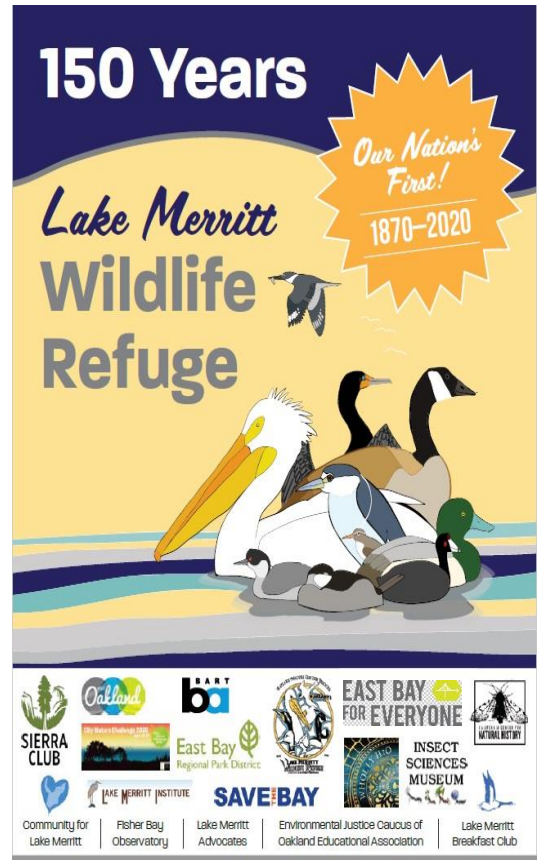
Adding to the delight, it was sunny and pleasant for what felt like the first time in a long time, and we saw so many species – 48 in all – that there isn’t room for them all here. Yes indeed, it was a wonderful day at Lake Merritt, where every day....

*****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. ***

Observing the 150th Anniversary of the Lake Merritt Wildlife Refuge

Oakland is celebrating a unique 150th anniversary on March 18th, 2020 – the 150th anniversary of North America’s first wildlife refuge. On that date in 1870, the California State Legislature passed the California Wildlife Act conferring protection on Lake Merritt, on “any wild animal or game, of any kind or species whatever” therein and on the surrounding land out to 100 rods (about 5 football fields) from the mean high-water level. The Act encoded into law a revolutionary ecosystem approach and foreshadowed issues of stewardship of Planet Earth that continue to this day (and into the future).

A local citizens group, Rotary Nature Center Friends, has raised funds to put 25 commemorative banners around the City. Donations for the banners, posters, and commemorative t-shirts may be mailed to the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club Charitable Foundation, P.O. Box P.O. Box 10468, Oakland CA 94610. There will be a formal ceremony at Lake Merritt at which the Mayor, City civic leaders and environmental groups including the Sierra Club, Council members, SaveSFBay, BART and East Bay Regional Parks will issue proclamations and give commemorative remarks. An overarching theme will be addressing the challenges of conservation and environmentalism amidst 21st Century homelessness, population density, waste management, and recreational needs we have in the Bay Area. The anniversary will be observed with environmental education and stewardship activities throughout the anniversary year 2020.



Formal ceremony to be held on March 18th, 10:15 am – 12:15 pm at Lake Merritt.

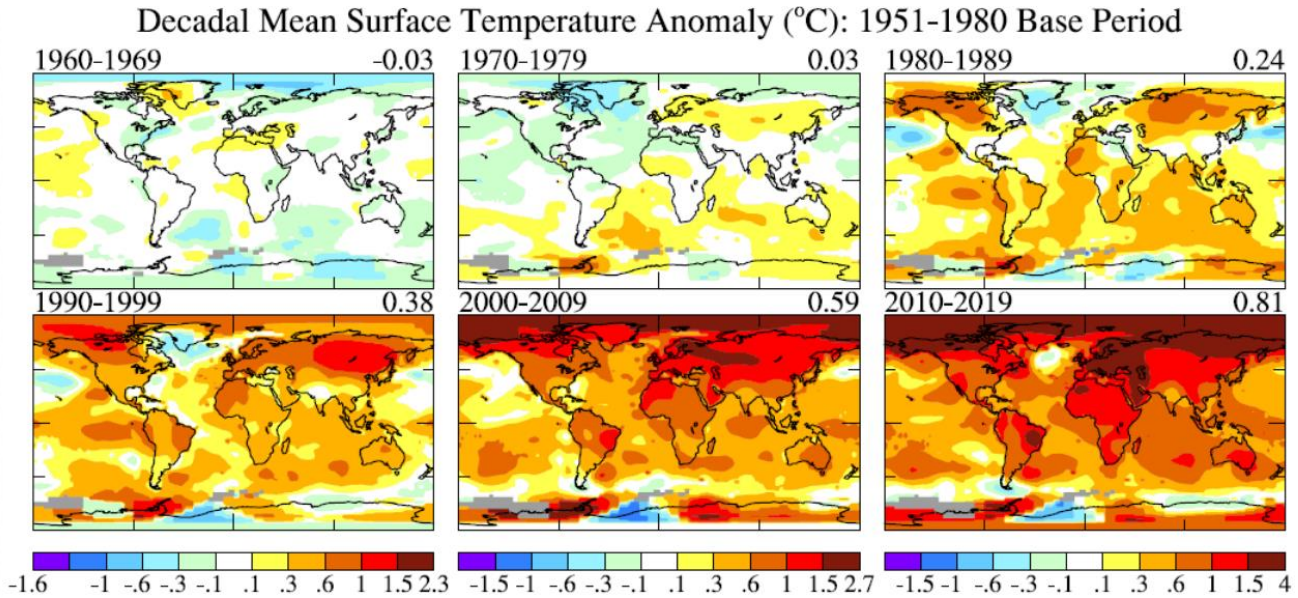
March 15th - Water Protector Tour & Pollinator Palooza (Pollinator Posse)

Come celebrate the 150th anniversary of our nation’s oldest wildlife Sanctuary, Lake Merritt. The Pollinator Posse will be speaking about raising awareness of water issues in the region. A day of hands-on workshops, speakers, music, educational booths and short films, highlighting the importance of pollinators and clean water. Music with David Gans, Michael DiMartino and more. It’s time to take personal responsibility for eliminating environmental toxins for personal and environmental health. Full Tour 2020 schedule at

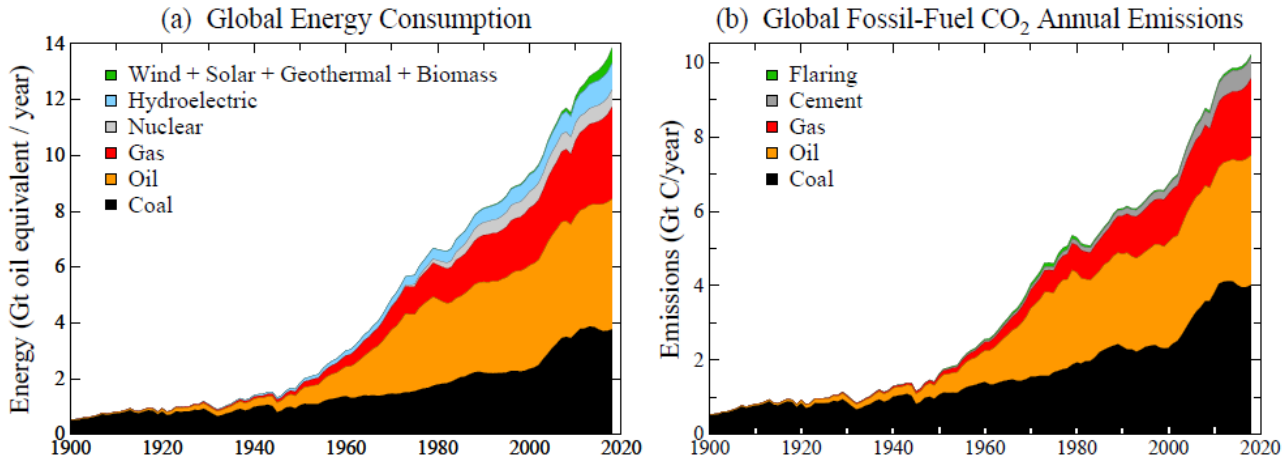
www.WaterProtectorTour.org. **2-8pm at the Gardens of Lake Merritt, 666 Bellevue Ave, 94610.**

CLIMATE CORNER: -- A Guest Editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

What is happening: Global temperatures have steadily increased: <http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/>



Why is this happening? Temperatures have increased because people on the planet have been burning ever increasing amounts of coal, oil and gas, causing ever increasing emissions of greenhouse gas into the atmosphere.



Who is responsible for the increased use of fossil fuels, increased carbon emissions and temperatures? The increases have been due to lobbying by fossil fuel companies, and the politicians who help them.

<https://skepticalscience.com/print.php?n=4643>

What can be done? Placing a tax on these companies and rebating 100% of the money to all citizens in equal shares will pay people to slow their use of fossil fuels. This is part of HR 763, now before Congress, and as variations in several similar bills.

<https://citizensclimatelobby.org/blog-new-carbon-pricing-bills-rooney-lipinski/> Join 23 California co-sponsors of HR 763.



YOUTH WATER QUALITY REPORT

St. Paul's Episcopal Middle School 6th grade students with their teacher Ryan Faulkner took these readings on January 25th at the Lake Merritt Boating Center dock.

Dissolved Oxygen top 6 parts per million (ppm) / bottom 7ppm (high)

pH top 7/bottom 7.2 (normal)

Salinity top 24 parts per thousand (ppt) /bottom 30 ppt (high).

Water Temperature top 12 degrees Celsius (54 degrees Fahrenheit) top/ bottom 12 deg Celsius (54 degrees Fahrenheit) (normal)

Water Clarity (Secchi) >1.82 meters (Clear)



St. Paul's 6th graders test the lake water for salinity.

LETTING A TURTLE GO IN LAKE MERRITT IS NOT KIND. TURTLES RELEASED IN THE LAKE'S SALTY WATER END UP DEAD!

See "Turtle Tragedy" in [August 2017 issue of The Tidings](#)



Doomed turtle hauls out on a drowned racoon.

The red-ear sliders found in the lake are considered "one of the most invasive species in the world." While they don't live in Lake Merritt, elsewhere in California they vie for food and sunny basking sites with endangered western pond turtles, whose populations are in rapid decline due to agriculture and urbanization.



The Tidings Editor delivers a red-eared slider to The Bay Area Turtle and Tortoise Rescue in Castro Valley.

If you rescue a turtle at Lake Merritt contact the Bay Area Turtle and Tortoise Rescue at (510) 886-2946.

MORE ABOUT HANK:

How much fish does Hank need? Wild adult American White Pelicans eat approximately 4 pounds of fish per day. Hank's diet has been supplemented with 2-3 pounds per day, costing about \$20.00 per week. In past years, feeding Hank was the duty of a Rotary Nature Center Staff person and took approximately 20 minutes.

Legality of Feeding Hank (See [The Tidings, June 2019](#) pp. 2,8).

From CA Fish & Wildlife Biologist January 27, 2020:

"I'm glad to hear of the dedication that citizen volunteers have shown, in providing fish to the disabled American White Pelican at Lake Merritt as was done almost every morning the past 15 years.

I think that a citizen-led program should continue, such that Hank the pelican can live out her days at Lake Merritt where she is comfortable being fed during the winter months. I support the citizen volunteers being willing to fund and assist after training by Steven who trained helpers in the past as being the best outcome."

John Krause, Environmental Scientist (Wildlife Biologist)
Marin, Contra Costa and Alameda Counties
California Department of Fish & Wildlife www.wildlife.ca.gov

ON THE 150th ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAKE MERRITT WILDIFE REFUGE and HANK
by the late Rex Burress, Supervising Naturalist at the Rotary Nature Center 1975-1993

Sat, May 25, 2019 10:37 am

I notice that "Hank" is sometimes referred to as 'Him', and again as 'She.' What is he? These 'Trans' ages are so weird!

More pressing than Hank, it seems to me, is the status of Lake Merritt Wildlife Refuge, and the important issue that that declaration of 1870 with the city be maintained. As I understand it, wild migratory waterfowl or other birds are welcome, even without any pedigrees, and that includes pelicans in whatever status. Our original two, Hector and Helen, were captured and brought to Lake Merritt from Pyramid Lake in Nevada, with the government's blessings. There may have been papers involved but I didn't see them. That pair was brought in the 1970's, and Hector lived until the mid-1980's, and Helen lived on until about 1995. During those years, there would be an occasional group of wild white pelicans fly over and drop down to stay a couple days, and then continue on their migratory flight. Hector and Helen couldn't fly completely.

During the regular 3:30 p.m. feeding of the birds and the feeding of the pelicans, several other fish-eating birds would line up for a little fish. It was an exotic show, and the extra feed thought quite worthy. A brown pelican, Brownie, became a regular, and it too, 'performed' for its fish. On instruction, it would fly around the island and back to catch its fish! Gulls, cormorants, and an annual cattle egret would be in on that show.

The milo grain was the key to the refuge's popularity. I think a ton a month was purchased to supplement the bird's diet and used to keep some of the waterfowl in close for good views and photographs. Roger Tory Peterson visited several times and said Lake Merritt was the greatest place in the world to get closeups of migratory waterfowl. That feed started in 1917 by the city. There were city fathers who recognized and supported the refuge and nature center's importance to the people of Oakland.

Rex Burress

PHOTOS OF OUR AMAZING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS CLEANING THE LAKE:

We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job!

YOU can support the Lake Merritt Institute's important work. Go to lakemerrittinstitute.org to find out how.

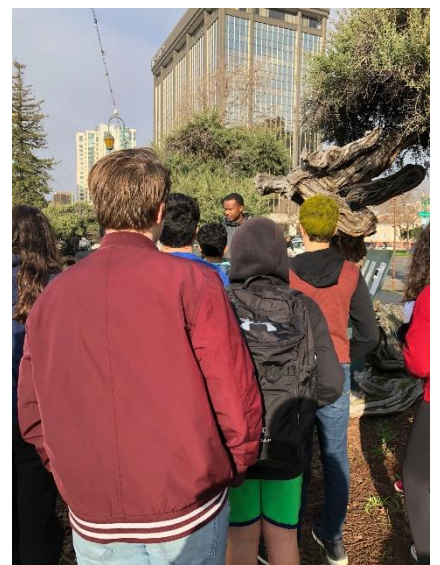
JANUARY 2020

Volunteer groups: **Irving High School, St. Paul's Episcopal School, Oakland Technical High School** and our **U-Clean-It** self-organized teams and the **LMI A-TEAM** regulars.



MARTIN LUTHER KING Jr DAY

Volunteer groups: Oakland High, Education, Defense & Justice for Youth (EDJY), Park Day School, St. Paul's Episcopal School and our U-Clean-It self-organized teams and the LMI A-TEAM regulars.



LMI Staffer Paris Organist turns illegal dumping into a good deed. Thank you!!

Paris, LMI staff, removed suitcase, rollerblades and a large amount of clothes. Not only did he remove them but washed, folded and donated the clothes. The clothes were in good condition.



MORE PHOTOS



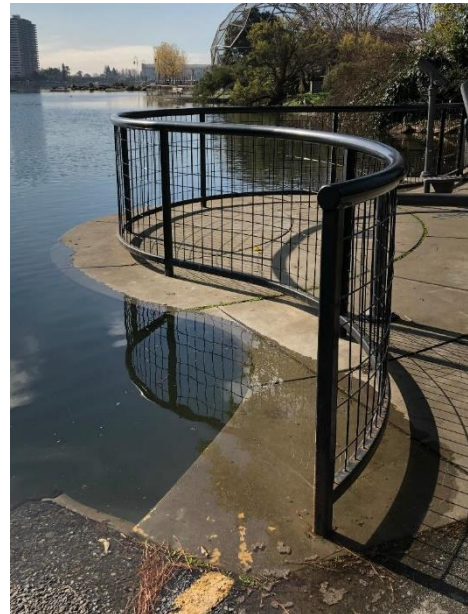
February 2020; Photo by Ingrid Taylor



Hank had a Valentine's visitor on February 13th; photo by Jan Novak, iNaturalist

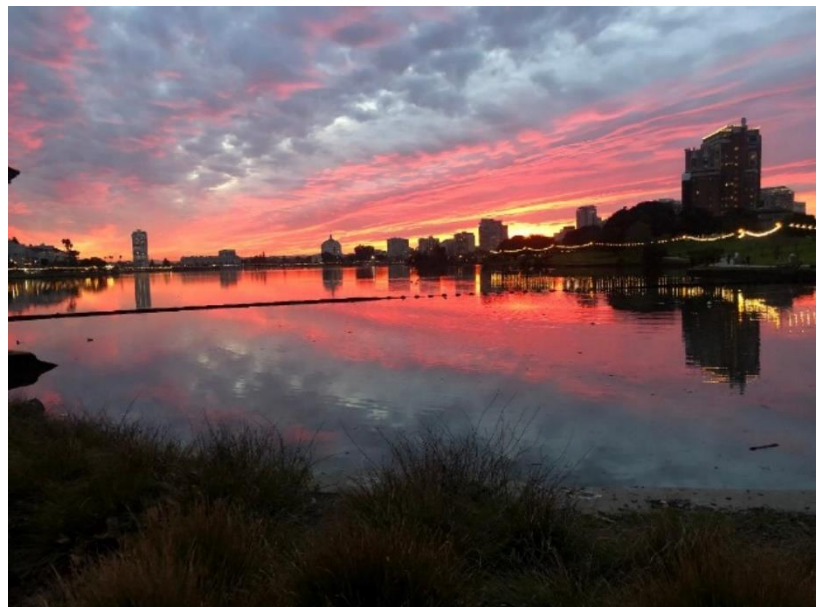


The HULK!



High water for the 4th Wednesday Birdwalk

Lake Merritt Sunset; Photo by James Robinson



REFERENCES - February 2020 Tidings:

Measure Q

Campaign kick-off <https://vimeo.com/386569825>

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/editorials/article/Editorial-Chronicle-recommends-yes-on-Oakland-15048788.php>

<http://beyondchron.org/oaklands-measure-q-boosts-parks-homeless-services/>

Oakland Parks in Crisis:

http://oaklandparks.org/sites/default/files/2018%20Report%20on%20the%20State%20of%20Maintenance%20of%20Oakland%20Parks_0.pdf

Hank

The Tidings June 2019 – 2 articles on p. 2 and p. 8

<https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/06-2019-TT-Email-final-6-14.pdf>

https://www.fws.gov/refuge/upper_klamath/

Email correspondence with John Krause, CDFW biologist.

Essay by Rex Burress, May 27, 2020

Lake Merritt Channel -Interview with Kristin Hathaway:

2002 LM Master Plan -

<http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakca1/groups/pwa/documents/webcontent/oak028480.pdf>

Lake Merritt Channel Plan

<http://www2.oaklandnet.com/government/o/PWA/o/EC/s/MeasureDD/OAK025953>

Meeting and Notes: Measure DD Community Coalition Meeting January 20

Interview with Kristin Hathaway January 13, 2020.

150th Anniversary of the Lake Merritt Wildlife Refuge

<https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/06-2019-TT-Email-final-6-14.pdf>

Wildlife Act of 1870 <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/Government/o/opr/s/Parks/OAK032395>

<https://blog.nwf.org/2011/10/north-americas-1st-wildlife-refuge-lake-merritt-oakland-ca/>

Turtles -Red-eared Sliders

<https://news.berkeley.edu/2019/08/22/how-red-eared-invaders-are-hurting-californias-native-turtles/>

<https://peerj.com/articles/7444/>

Please direct questions and comments to The Tidings Editor, Katie Noonan, at ktnoon@aol.com.

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Thank you, A-Team!

Clean Lake Volunteers and Director James Robinson led another great Martin Luther King Day Lake Clean-up!