

THE TIDINGS



LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

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A community based, non-profit corporation, established 1995; IRS Code 501(c)(3): EIN 94-3214160

VOLUME XXIV

MARCH 2020

ISSUE III

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

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, LAKE MERRITT WILDLIFE REFUGE!

Oakland celebrated a unique 150th anniversary on March 18th, 2020 – the anniversary of the North America’s first wildlife refuge at Lake Merritt. On that date in 1870, the California State Legislature passed the California Wildlife Act conferring protection on “any wild animal or game, of any kind or species whatever” at Lake Merritt, 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).



Photo by John Kirkmire

Rotary Nature Center Friends, together with Lake Merritt Advocates, lakemerritt.org, and the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club Charitable Foundation (providing fiscal sponsorship), raised funds to put twenty commemorative banners up on City light poles and in local BART stations. Artwork for the banners was created by Adrian Cotter and design work was done by Kerstin Fermin. Mayor Libby Schaaf issued a Proclamation declaring March 18th to be Lake Merritt Wildlife Refuge Day. A formal ceremony had been planned with the overarching theme of addressing the challenges of Conservation and Environmentalism amidst 21st Century homelessness, population density, waste management, and recreational needs we have in the Bay Area. Postponed due to the COVID-19 health crisis, the event and tabling activities to follow have been rescheduled for SAT July 18th 2020. The anniversary will be honored with environmental education and stewardship activities throughout the anniversary year 2020. See the Banner Project page on lakemerritt.org for a list of the generous donors, photos and more details. **LOVE YOUR LAKE....** 🌱

THANK YOU, OAKLAND VOTERS! Measure Q PASSES with 68.08% majority
Final absentee ballots have been counted and the results are in: Oakland’s Measure Q has reached the 2/3 majority of voters casting ballots needed to pass (go to acgov.org). The Lake Merritt Institute thanks Oaklanders for taking on this additional tax burden to invest in parks maintenance, help the homeless, and improve water quality by voting for Measure Q. Measure Q will raise \$21 million dollars annually for these critical needs.

LMI in FEBRUARY: 2,550 gallons of trash were removed from the lake in February. Total gallons collected in 2020 is **5,280 gallons**. *The City will henceforth measure trash in gallons not pounds.

LMI Director James Robinson and Staff hosted **104 volunteers**, made 2 educational presentations and attended 1 meeting
0.0” inches rain were recorded by LMI rain gauge.

Editorial: *Everyone* Must Shelter in Place

Mayor Libby Schaaf, the Alameda County Department of Public Health, the National Center for Disease Control, California Governor Gavin Newsom, and President Trump have directed all people to shelter in place and practice social distancing (avoid coming into contact with other people). No age group is exempt, and the effectiveness of this effort to fight the COVID-19 pandemic depends on everyone being all-in. Consult the most recent recommendations of government and health departments before leaving home at: <http://www.acphd.org>

The Lake Merritt Institute has suspended all volunteer clean-up activities until further notice, including the use of our U-Clean-It boxes. Staff is doing minimal essential activities to address heavy influx of trash during the first rains of 2020 (First Flush).

CAN WE WALK THE LAKE?

Walking or running the 3.4-mile footpath around Lake Merritt is highly popular and important to the mental and physical health of many, especially in troubled times. It can draw up to 10,000 people outside per day. Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development Director has cancelled all gatherings and organized activities in Lakeside Park due to COVID-19 precautions. Park buildings and some areas have been closed. However, many trails and open spaces remain open. Check your destination website.

The National Recreation and Park Association created the graphic below to show what social distancing looks like in a park. Important points are to stay 6 feet away from other people and avoid touching surfaces like rails, park benches, etc. Wash hands frequently. Bathrooms will be closed. If you are ill, stay home.



National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) www.nrpa.org



EPA scientist receives our March 2nd samples

“WET SEASON 2020” EPA Citizen Bacteria Monitoring Begins and May Be Last - Oakland citizens have been monitoring levels of *E. coli* bacteria in the lake since 2018 using an E.P.A. citizen monitoring protocol. Samples are collected for 5 consecutive weeks in the DRY SEASON and 5 consecutive weeks in the WET SEASON. The EPA Lab in Richmond analyzed the samples and the data were shared with the City Stormwater Division and appeared in The Tidings.

Twenty twenty (2020) may be last year of monitoring, however, unless a private contractor can be found to do the analysis. Partnering with Friends of Sausal Creek is being explored. The Richmond EPA Region 9 lab is being moved to Oregon as part of downsizing by the Trump Administration. LINKS [1](#) and [2](#)

Spring Sprang Early at Lake Merritt - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon Society

“That’s the bird of the day!” sang out one of the 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon crew in February, looking up at a catalpa tree across from the Garden Center. As always when approaching the pair of trees flanking the path about midway through the walk, I’d stopped to point out the horizontal rows of holes in the bark and explain that they were made by Red-breasted Sapsuckers – the slim rusty-hooded woodpeckers that farm these trees, drilling holes and then returning to them to clean out both the sap that bleeds in and the bugs that come to eat the sap. Also, as just about always, we scanned the trees, found no sapsuckers – recorded on only seven other occasions in more than a decade of monthly visits – and crossed the street, heading for the garden. Then someone toward the rear of the group looked back and said, “SAPSUCKER!!”



Red-breasted Sapsucker; Wikipedia

We crowded round and got all the available scopes on the bird, which spent a satisfactory few minutes walking slowly up the trunk and providing good views for all. A number of unusually bright golden Lesser Goldfinches moved through the catalpas while we were watching, adding to the fun.

The day, warm and sunny and windless, was already off to a good start when the sapsucker took center stage. We’d seen Red-breasted Mergansers from the parking lot near the dome cage, along with many of the remaining winter migrants (Common Goldeneyes, Bufflehead, assorted scaup), plus both a Green Heron and a Belted Kingfisher, two of the showiest attractions of any walk. Strolling past the Nature Center toward El Embarcadero, we’d passed an active Black Phoebe nest and spotted the remaining winter ducks (Canvasbacks and Ruddy Ducks – some actually starting to turn ruddy), plus both kinds of egrets, all five wintering grebes, and the first few Double-crested Cormorants (still crestless and ignoring nest sites) of the season.

Hank-the-Rescue-Pelican (alone last month) had not one but three visitors, all starting to show their breeding bumps. Could this be the year Hank’s company stays? And on top of everything else, we spotted a still-spotless Spotted Sandpiper fossicking around the shore of the bird paddock, looking like a regular despite not being seen since a year ago. Spotted Sandpipers are fun to watch, and they’d be easy to recognize if they were called “Pumping Sandpipers” or somesuch – they all always waggle their rumps up and down while walking or perching, but they have spots on their otherwise plain white breasts only a few weeks a year, and this wasn’t one of them.

Also, at the lake, a Northern Rough-winged Swallow (the earliest since 2015) buzzed past, possibly scoping out nesting holes in the wall, and perched in one of the bare island trees. In the park, we picked up an American Robin – an uncommon sighting here these days – and the first Steller’s Jay (the dark blue crested one) since 2018.



American Robin; John Kirkmire

All told, we counted 52 species – up from last year’s 45, 44 in 2018, and only 39 back in 2017 – so it was an exciting morning, especially as long as we could squint and not-see how few of each kind of duck dotted the lake. Aside from that, and ignoring the basic wrongness of 70-degree-plus sunshine in late February, it was yet another wonderful day at Lake Merritt, where every day has wonders of its own.

***** AUDUBON 4th Wednesday BIRDWALKS AT THE LAKE are cancelled until further notice. *****

YOUTH WATER QUALITY REPORT

Merritt College students with their teacher Ben Nelson took these readings on February 20th at the Rotary Nature Center. *Katie Noonan took bottom readings and Secchi depth reading at the Lake Merritt Boating Center dock.

Dissolved Oxygen top 7 parts per million (ppm) / bottom 8 ppm (high)

pH top 7/bottom 7 (normal)

Salinity top 32 parts per thousand (ppt) /bottom 30 ppt (high).

Water Temperature top 14.5 degrees Celsius (58 degrees Fahrenheit) top/ bottom 15 deg Celsius (59 degrees Fahrenheit) (normal)

Water Clarity (Secchi) >1.55 meters (Clear)



Merritt College Marine Biology student tests the lake water for dissolved oxygen.

CLIMATE CORNER: -- YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

A Guest Editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

Yesterday: Beginning almost unnoticed in the late 1800's, the impacts of an ever-exploding human population began to change our climate. The changes were easily seen during the 1980's in graphs which show global levels of carbon dioxide higher than any the planet has experienced in hundreds of thousands of years. Temperatures related to this greenhouse gas also began to rise on a very noticeable curve. Predictions made by climate scientists, computer models and oil company staff showed that our massive use of fossil fuels, coupled with numerous and powerful positive feedback loops that are built in to our planet, were going to push climate out of the bounds of what has been experienced by human civilization.

Today: In Australia, an area the size of the state of Mississippi burned in a few short months. In the southeast United States, hurricanes, river flooding, sea level rise and algae laden beaches have made a mockery of politicians who tried to prevent the use of the words "climate change" in official state documents. In California, the longest drought on record damaged agriculture production and threatened water supplies. Across a global belt at the middle of the planet, changing climate and social upheaval have created millions of climate migrants, striving and dying to reach lands where they could survive. In 2015, the Sierra snowpack — the source of one-third of the state's fresh water — reached its [lowest level](#) in 500 years. The town of Paradise, CA burned to the ground. In November 2018, air pollution in Oakland became "very unhealthy."

Tomorrow – Current Predictions: Regarding the town of Morrow, The Kingston Trio once sang "You cannot go to Morrow any more today, because the train to that goes to Morrow is a mile upon its way." That is our predicament now as we consider how to get back to a compatible climate tomorrow: Based on current trends, we can't get there. Despite Pollyanna rhetoric by moderate candidates to the contrary, planetary levels of greenhouse gas continue to rise, having hit 414 this year. They were 310 the year I was born, and are increasing at more than 2 every year. Unless that increase levels off and is forced back to 350, the climate will continue to get worse. Even if we achieve this unimaginable task, heat now in the oceans is enough to ensure that temperatures will continue to rise for decades. Sea level will continue to rise because we can't cool the oceans, nor re-freeze ice at the planetary poles. By 2030 nearly [half of the world's population](#) will be living in regions with water stress. The U.S. which produces 1/4 of the world's grain supply, could see as much as a 50% loss in crop productivity by 2080. Your children, and especially theirs, face an uncertain and diminishing future.

Tomorrow – What if...? What will it take to provide a livable climate for the children of the Earth? Experts tell us we must do such and such by 2030 to hold the temperature rise to 3.6 degrees (Note: it has already increased 1.5 degrees). Since individual actions falter at the required massive change, what does this mean for how we collectively act? Realistically stated, it will take an effort rivaling that mounted in the U.S. to fight World War II, which included rationing, the temporary cessation of auto production, war bonds, and personal sacrifice including military service. Translated into what we need to do today, this means wresting political power away from those who use it for personal gain, greed, and exploitation of the disenfranchised, poor and those with pre-existing conditions. It means stopping fracking before we frack ourselves to death. It means the cessation of subsidies for fossil fuels. It means a carbon tax (hopefully with the revenues distributed on an equal share basis to everyone). It means the phase out of most internal combustion engines in about ten years. It means a national electrical grid so that every utility can provide cheap energy to their customers. It means an avoidance of powder puff solutions like re-join the Paris Agreement, incremental changes in mileage standards and dozens of controversial laws aimed at narrow climate solutions. It means that everyone must realize that current actions to save a few bucks means infrastructure costs (or degraded services) that are far in excess of costs for more energy efficiency. It means a climate revolution on a scale that counters the changes now being forced upon us.



U.S. Department of Defense, 2008.

This is not a drill. This is us, today. I am sorry if you don't want to take part in such necessary changes, but please don't force everyone else to survive the future climate we are creating. Take action.



Hurricane Katrina. Wikipedia

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

THANK YOU TO OUR FEBRUARY VOLUNTEERS! Volunteer groups: **San Leandro High School, Oakland High School, St. Paul's Episcopal School**, our **U-Clean-It** self-organized teams and the **LMI A-TEAM** regulars. Special thanks to Executive Director James Robinson, and LMI Staff who voluntarily continue work. We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job!

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

"The Tidings" is published by the Lake Merritt Institute (LMI) entirely with private funding donated to LMI, and not with funds from the City of Oakland. To contribute to LMI, use PayPal at the LMI website (lakemerrittinstitute.org) or send a check to: Lake Merritt Institute, 568 Bellevue Ave., Oakland, CA 94610-5026. LMI is a California State non-profit corporation; IRS Code 501(c)(3): EIN 94-3214160