

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

Citizen Stewards Step In -THANK YOU!

The Lake Merritt Institute has been working out how to fulfill our mission and meet contract obligations in the face of the unfolding Covid-19 pandemic. Safety of our staff, our volunteers and the public has been our foremost concern. As one of many civic and community organizations, we have been unable to host the hundreds of in-person volunteers/month we usually host for lake clean-ups at Lake Merritt.

We want to express our deep appreciation to the individual citizens, city public works employees, and local organizations who stepped in to remove thousands of bags of litter from the parklands and shoreline at Lake Merritt.

FROM OUR LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE VOLUNTEERS:

“ANOTHER ALLY IN THE FIGHT TO CLEAN
LAKE MERRITT”

by Laura Goderez and Susan Campodonico

MUDLAB, originally on Telegraph in Oakland, has opened another venue in the former Perch Coffee House site on Grand Avenue near Lake Merritt. MudLab bills itself as a zero waste store, a combination "cafe, book store, community center and event space" and not only offers bulk groceries, books, baked goods, soaps, etc. (all dispensed **ONLY** into customers' reusable containers) but also sponsors community awareness and activities around environmental issues. MudLab also participates in free food distribution with food from the [Alameda County Community Food Bank](#).



MUDLAB at 440 Grand Avenue.

Most relevant to us at the LMI is a [Summer Clean Up Contest](#) now in progress. MudLab has sponsored 37 volunteers to take one section each of Lake Merritt and clean it up once a month. The individual who picks up the most trash will win \$1000 (with smaller prizes for the runners-up). The contest runs from June to the end of August and over 300 bags of trash have been collected so far. The Altamont Education Fund is helping MudLab with the funding for this effort. Another event is planned for later this year. Anyone wanting to know more about either the current contest or future events can email Vanessa at vanessa@forhereplease.com.
Nice to know there are others so committed to keeping our beloved lake CLEAN!

LMI in JUN and JULY: Formal trash removal operations were on pause because of the Covid pandemic. The total gallons collected as of May 31st in 2020 was 13,580 gallons.

LMI Director James Robinson made 1 presentation by Zoom to over 100 high school students.

0.00 inches rain were recorded in June and July at OAK International Airport station.



City Councilmember Lynette McElhaney’s Representative Sean Tanner (picker raised) has rallied citizens for socially-distanced trash clean-ups every second Sunday morning. The results have been amazing. Thank you!

[The Youth Empowerment Partnership](#) is a nonprofit dedicated to providing all Oakland youth and young adults with the necessary work history, experience and soft skills to be self-sufficient, stable, and engaged members of our communities. Crews collected trash all around the lake throughout the week.

Thank You!

STORM DRAIN DEFENDERS – TEAM OAKLAND Y.E.P. INTERNS

Throughout the months of July and August, over 100 young people from all over Oakland participated in [Team Oakland](#), a City-sponsored summer employment program for Oakland youth between the ages of 15 and 24. At Lake Merritt, and elsewhere in Oakland, they removed litter that would have ended up in Lake Merritt and other waterways.



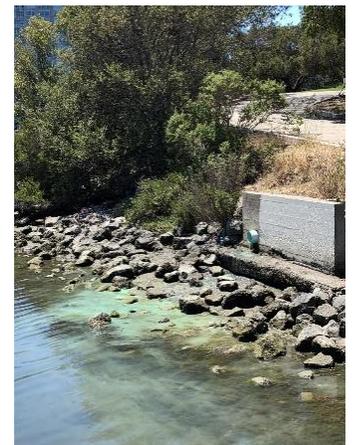
The interns received job training via Zoom from Rotary Nature Center Friends on Biodiversity in Oakland and from LMI’s Executive Director James Robinson and Oakland Public Works’ Jennifer Stern on Watersheds and water quality.

During the Black Lives Matter protests, paint from the Bellevue street mural project flowed through unmarked storm drains into the lake. One TEAM OAKLAND group worked with Rotary Nature Center Friends and Oakland Public Works to mark the storm drains on Bellevue Avenue with decals stating “Drains to Bay.”



Student places a storm drain decal.

The students learned about the hydrology of the lake and its connection with the bay via the channel. They also got the chance to walk along the mural and discuss the issues of systemic racism, diversity and inclusion it represented. The students got hands-on training measuring water quality with RNCF staff. They learned about marshes and restoration at the Sailboat House Marsh and explored the underwater world of the lake with the Trident underwater robotic vehicle. Adrian Cotter of Lake Merritt Underwater Observatory taught them how to drive the vehicle and how to recognize common features and inhabitants. No treasure chests or dead bodies were found.



Paint flows into lake.

WATER QUALITY REPORT – [The Great Secchi DipIn](#)

July 5th readings at the Lake Merritt Boating Center dock by Rotary Nature Center Friends’ Underwater Observatory Alumni Team

Lake Merritt’s 17th year of participation in the international water monitoring event!

Dissolved Oxygen 7 ppm top/8 ppm top (high) pH 7 top/7 bottom (normal)

Salinity 33 ppt top/29 ppt bottom (normal for midsummer).

Water Temperature 26 degrees Celsius top (78 degrees Fahrenheit) top/26 deg Celsius bottom (78 degrees Fahrenheit) (HOT!) Water Clarity (Secchi) 2.00 meters CLEAR!





THANK YOU to individual LMI A-TEAM Volunteers Miriam, Susan, Laura and Yunah!

During the Covid-19 pandemic, LMI's U-Clean-It boxes are not available for drop-by use by the public. However, the A-Team will train people who are dedicated to cleaning the lake in a responsible distanced way.

June - Five Heron Day at Lake Merritt - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon Society



Juvenile Green Heron; photo by Lee Aurich.

The June 4th-Wednesday (non) Golden Gate Audubon walk – fourth of the pandemic season – drew four birders besides the leaders, and mixed up the numbers by finding all five of the heron species that frequent the lake. Most notably, a juvenile Green Heron (yellow legs, lots of cream in the cinnamon-colored breast) swooped down at an adult (orange legs, mostly cinnamon breast with a bit of cream) and got firmly pecked away, unfed. The life of an adolescent is tough everywhere! The youngster landed on the rocky waterline of the bird paddock and prowled toward the human group, snapping things off the rocks and once out of the air on the way. We also had both adult and juvenile Black-crowned Night-Herons and Great and Snowy Egrets, and a Great Blue Heron flew slowly past like an airborne battleship. (Neither Great had showed up for the June walk since 2006, and we'd seen each of them just once this year, one in January and the other in February!)

In the cormorant rookery, parents tended two youngsters in the last of the nine nests; the babies were almost full-sized but clearly a ways from fledging, being still covered with inky black down. Their juvenal plumage will be various shades of bronze, dark on the back and pale to almost white on the breast, but if (as I did for years!) you look for nestlings lighter than their black parents, it always looks like there aren't any.

The lake surface was thin of company: the winter ducks are long gone, and we saw no grebes, not even a coot! Of course, there were lots and lots of Canada Geese – several hundred of which are here for molt migration, cruising the lake and grazing the lawns while waiting for their flight suits to grow back. Mallards were out in force, too, more drakes than hens, though they're hard to spot in their eclipse plumage: this is the time of year when they lose their bright green heads and their natty gray backs and curly little tail plumes. And their flight feathers, just like the geese, so it makes sense for them to go for camouflage for a while. Only their yellow bills reveal their sex right now. Once their flight feathers grow back in, they'll molt the drab feathers and turn bright again – just in time for the fall, which is party season for ducks.

We also saw several White Pelicans here to visit with Hank (our rescue bird) though not nearly so many as the 50-plus reported from the preceding Sunday. Several were fishing the lake, and a squad of seven or eight cruised overhead, looking like pterodactyls come to life.

This was the peak of swallow season – April, May and June are the months when we’re almost sure to see them – and the lawns and lake were zooming with Northern Rough-winged and Violet-green Swallows. We have bugs to feed them all year round, as witness the constant presence of Black Phoebes, but chances are they’ll all be gone in July anyway. Where to? Who knows? Not here, even though the whole western U.S. is all in their summer range.

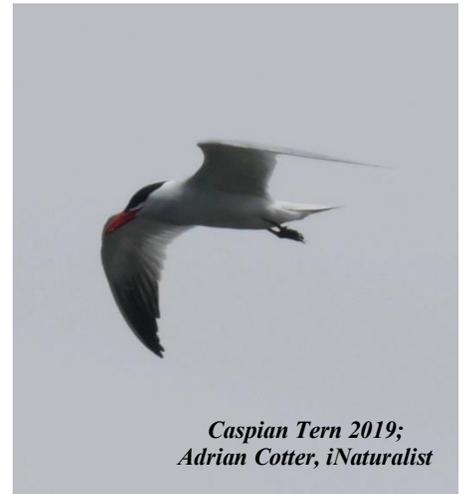
Bluebirds with babies were bouncing back and forth from ground to branch all over the park. (Baby Western Bluebirds – the kind we have here – hardly look like their parents; they’re clear gray and heavily speckled on breast and back, but you can spot them by their wing and tail feathers, which are properly blue.) We also saw some Chestnut-backed Chickadees and some Lesser Goldfinches, but no Oak Titmice at all, despite how hard we looked for them wherever chickadees were hanging out.

The day’s other highlight was a young Cooper’s Hawk that some crows chased into a tree right over our heads, causing assorted small birds to play statue even though the hawk had other things on its mind at the moment. That brought the count to 31 species, about average for June – the low side of the year, but still offering enough to enjoy and talk about to make it another in Lake Merritt’s unbroken string of variously very good days.

July – Escape to Lake Merritt - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon Society

The July 4th-Wednesday non-Golden Gate Audubon walk made a welcome break in a week of computer hell. (Word to the wise: If Windows crashes, refuses to reboot, and says it can restore itself if you’re willing to reinstall all your programs, say NO. It lies.) That disaster made it especially good to get out in the mask-filtered free air and find some living humans: not just the co-leader but five socially distanced birders, one completely new to the event.

First treat of the morning: a pair of Caspian Terns – white and gray birds the size of gulls but super-streamlined, with bright orange beaks like cocktail frankfurters – cruised almost wingtip to wingtip around the islands, passing practically right overhead. We’ve seen singleton Caspians from time to time, but never two together like this. Then, while we were still at the meeting point (the end of the parking lot nearest the dome cage) a Green Heron flew over to our beach and strolled briskly into the rocks, tempting us to walk alongside and try for another look. After a few short flights along the shore, the bird got disgusted and headed off toward the boathouse, and we shrugged guiltily and hiked around the art center toward the bird paddock. Normally we’d cut between the center and the cage, but the usual route was entirely blocked by a cherry-picker truck and a crew of painters – good to see infrastructure work in progress!



*Caspian Tern 2019;
Adrian Cotter, iNaturalist*

The paddock was thin of company as the ponds were mostly dry; a couple of park workers were busily scrubbing them, getting them ready to refill. Nonetheless, the ever-present Canada Geese were accompanied by a couple of gnarly-faced Muscovy Ducks and the Chinese Swan Goose, which let us talk about telling wild from domestic waterfowl – mainly a matter of size and fatness.

We spotted all five herons in the course of the morning (both egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons of all ages, still more Green Herons – one keeping a grim eye on an island raccoon – and finally a Great Blue). The latter showed up in apparent response to my firm “Now we need to see a Great Blue Heron,” a request of the universe that works often enough to maintain birders’ faith in it – so ours remained unshaken, despite having no luck with calls for a scrub jay and a Cooper’s Hawk.

Lots of White Pelicans crowded one of the islands, lounging like people crowding a beach in happier times. We peered around for the baby Brown Pelican seen paddling in the area the day before, but no luck – wherever it was going, there it went.

On the next island over, four or five Double-crested Cormorants were taking an unexpected interest in the big bare tree. The nests there have been empty for weeks, and their former tenants should have no reason to return. Will there be a second round of breeding this year? It's happened before; in fact, when the rookery was at its busiest several years ago, *three* rounds kept the nests busy through September. The August trip will tell....

This was still baby bird season, with young Western Bluebirds showing off their speckled breasts and backs all over the lawns along Bellevue. The stars of the day, however, were a trio of newly fledged Bewick's Wrens chasing each other up and down a twisted tree root, really playing together and not squabbling over crumbs or sitting like a row of living cupcakes and waiting for parents to show up with food – something I'd never seen before except with young crows or falcons.

The Violet-green and Northern Rough-winged Swallows had moved on to new pastures, but it wasn't at all clear why. Crowds of Barn Swallows filled the air over the lawns, clearly finding plenty to eat. But who can tell what makes birds hold a convention in one spot rather than another? The 4th-Wednesday group hasn't encountered a Barn Swallow at the lake since June of 2018. Or not hold one, as far as that goes. This was the third month in a row without a single white-beaked black American Coot head-bobbing around the lake, and although the population does typically go way down in the summer, there's almost always at least one.

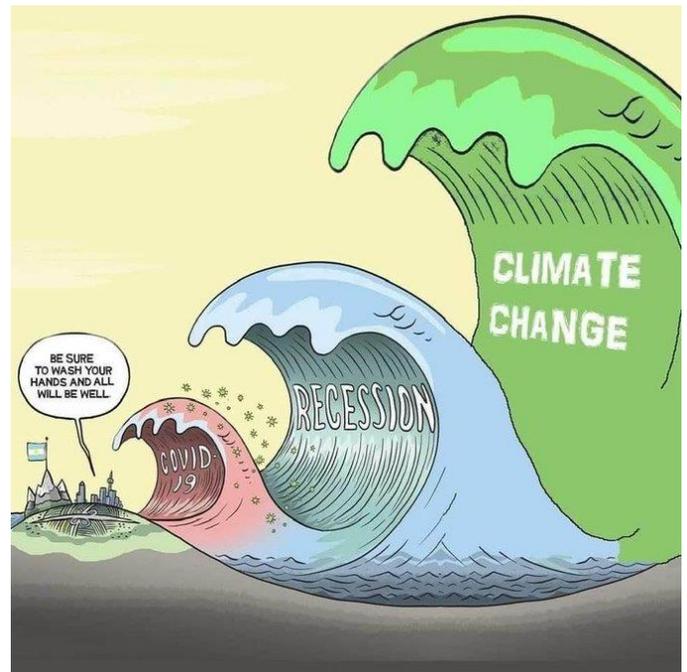
One of our group reported seeing a Turkey Vulture soaring overhead as she crossed the park on her way home, and I gleefully added it to the day's count. That brought us to 34 species all told, more than in any of the past three years: yet another good day at Lake Merritt – as good a day as the world provides in this bitter year....

*******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: -- The Big Picture -- A Guest Editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

When I was in graduate school, Eugene Odum, the father of modern ecology, would teach us never to forget the big picture, meaning that everything is connected to everything, and we need to see that picture, and all its interconnections, at one time. Now, fifty years later, that message rings ever-more true as we witness the rapid changes of life around us.

Our current big picture includes racism, which has always divided us, and is plainly on view at the highest level of government. It includes economic inequality that destroys the hopes of a growing number of people while being taunted by opulence. A virus for which there is no cure nor vaccine has made this racial and economic inequality worse, but governmental responses have been inadequate. Insufficient health care infects our ability to cope, but many refuse to establish systems that work in other nations. Social discord, crime, homelessness and riots tear at our social fabric while some leaders are openly disdainful of the reasons for such actions.



Climate disruption looms over all, with promises of more fires, floods, disease, storms, drought, and economic dislocation. These stresses are all related to each other. They interact. They are also related to underlying conditions that have been changing beneath our feet. What has been changing, and why?

Many of the answers can be seen in the death of bi-partisanship; political disfunction; bullying; lying; the slander of science; politicization of the military and justice systems; the sowing of fear, propaganda, violence, intimidation, and showmanship; attacks on mainstream media as fake news; infection of social media with partisan bias.

The specifics are even more frightening. Children have been put in cages; minority votes are being suppressed, efforts to sow chaos into the November elections are proceeding, journalists are being attacked and beaten, by police. The virus and climate change have been called a hoax. International allies have been forced to [launch bogus investigations into political opponents](#). Impeachment has been snubbed.

This has been happening as many of us try to go about our daily lives; but those lives have been changed. It was not supposed to happen this way; not in America. Democracy was supposed to bail us out. But while we have been sleeping, democracy has been severely weakened. As stated in the NY Times, our future under the present administration that controls the presidency and Senate is one of ethnocentricity and authoritarianism.

Wikipedia defines fascism as “a form of far-right, authoritarian ultra-nationalism characterized by dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition, as well as strong regimentation of society and of the economy”

The parallels between today and the rise of fascism are all too clear. That is a scary statement, but many that lived through the transformation of Germany before WWII, or have studied the rise of Nazism, will agree with it. As Bill Moyers said: “Can it happen here? It is happening here”

Think about that, and if you agree, what can be done? Look not to the status quo for salvation from these ills, nor to those that ignore these diseases. Look inside, be bold, and create the change that is needed. Support independent journalism, join a climate group, donate to the right candidate, volunteer, help those that cannot help themselves, practice non-violent resistance, dream of a civil society and follow that dream.

Sources for “The Big Picture”

<https://billmoyers.com/story/we-hold-this-truth-to-be-self-evident-its-happening-before-our-very-eyes/>

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/21281309/new-york-times-op-ed-editor-tom-cotton-is-trump-authoritarian>

Back to the Salt Marsh! The Measure DD Tidal Marsh on the Channel has been off limits for over a year because of unsanitary conditions and interference caused by human encampments nearby. However, in August, **Lake Merritt Weed Warriors Joel Peter and Jennie Gerard** brought a small group of volunteers out to plant 50 more pickleweed plants at the water’s edge. The pickleweeds, if protected from geese who love to eat them, have proven effective at stabilizing the shoreline.

The area remains closed to volunteers for the time being. More in the email issue of The Tidings.



Please direct questions and comments to The Tidings Editor, Katie Noonan, at TheTidings@lakemerrittinstitute.org.

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