

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

HOLIDAY CHEER from The LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE! BRING ON A NEW YEAR, PLEASE!

The Lake Merritt Institute joined forces with the [Lake Chalet](#) to raise a cozy Christmas display on the restaurant’s dock. The Christmas display continues a winter tradition first begun by the city and carried on by LMI for several years. It was a highlight for outside diners during the holiday season.

Unfortunately, due to the new regional stay-at-home order, the restaurant will be closed to inside dining until Jan 4th 2021. But it is still open for pick-up and delivery, and one can still glimpse the decorations from the pathway while walking the lake.

We need all the signs of hope we can get this year. Thank you LMI for adding this touch of joy to our Lake.



LOVE YOUR LAKE - GET THE EMAIL TIDINGS!!



To all our subscribers: If you receive a hard copy newsletter in the mail, or pick it up from a coffee shop, library or the volunteers at the You-Clean-It boxes, please consider switching your paid subscription from a print version of The Tidings to an electronic version. The Tidings will be emailed to you instead of snail mailed. This will help the LMI save on the cost of paper and envelopes, printing and postage, and the photos are in COLOR! A-Team volunteers must meet in person to stuff newsletters into envelopes each month (see photo at left). To request the email version please email lmi@netwiz.net with “Requesting email version” in the subject line. *Photos by James Robinson.*

LMI in NOVEMBER: 3210 gallons of trash were removed from the lake by staff and volunteers in NOVEMBER. Total gallons collected to date in 2020 is **28,140 gallons.**

LMI Director James Robinson and Staff hosted **80 volunteers** and made 1 presentation. **0.00** inches rain were recorded by LMI rain gauge gauge.



MAKE A CHARITABLE DONATION TO THE LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE IN 2020:

Just for 2020 income taxes, 87% of U.S. taxpayers who take the Standard Deduction may also benefit from additional tax incentives for donations up to \$300 made in 2020. And you don't have to itemize. The Lake Merritt Institute is a 501(c)3 non-profit charity, founded in 1992. We educate the public about urban runoff and involve them in solving the problem. Result: Volunteers remove [thousands of pounds](#) of lake trash are removed each year that would otherwise increase the world ocean's plastics crisis *and* Oakland's regulatory liability for water quality.

LMI is funded by the City of Oakland and by donations from caring people like you. Help us preserve our beautiful and hard-working lake in the heart of downtown Oakland. A membership application is at the end of this issue.

THE CLEAN LAKE PROGRAM WILL BE SUSPENDED UNTIL JANUARY

LMI's Executive Director and Board of Directors reluctantly decided that beginning December 21st normal trash removal operations must cease for the duration of the regional stay-at-home order. This includes volunteer groups and You-Clean-It stations. James will notify regular volunteers when it is safe to resume cleaning the lake.

If you would like to join the A-Team and other experienced volunteers who remove trash from the water at Lake Merritt, email LMI's Executive Director James Robinson at lmi@netwiz.net. He will arrange your training by an experienced volunteer when the shutdown is over so that you can clean the lake safely and properly with other physically-distanced volunteers or by using the U-Clean-It boxes.

Lake Merritt Beach Hopper.... Still an Enigma

Over 70 people from near and far tuned in to Dr. James Carlton's **Lakeside Chat** on December 4th. His 30-min talk, titled "An Unsolved Mystery: The Enigmatic Beach-Hopper of Lake Merritt", sponsored by [Rotary Nature Center Friends](#), can be seen on [YouTube](#): <https://youtu.be/LHZU24X3OWA>.

First thought to have come from Chile via lumber trade (Bousfield and Carlton, 1967), and later from somewhere in the southern hemisphere (Bousfield, 1982), the beach hopper changed it's story abruptly in 2019 with publication of a taxonomic revision linking it to northern hemisphere species. DNA analysis is planned. To make things worse for the casual marine biology aficionado, the beach hopper's scientific name has changed. No longer *Transorchestia enigmatica* the hopper is now *Bulychaeva enigmatica*.

The species' only known range is the 1,000 feet along the shore of Adams Point, prompting a suggestion that it should be declared an endangered species. Current worries for the survival of the Lake Merritt beach hopper, besides falling victim to souvenir-seeking naturalists, include misguided landscaping or building a retaining wall along the Adams Point shoreline (NOT proposed by Measure DD) or aggressive chemical and physical clean-ups of the nearby homeless encampments.

JANUARY'S LAKESIDE CHAT, the 2nd free monthly online talk on a variety of Lake Merritt topics, sponsored by [Rotary Nature Center Friends](#), will feature Jim Covell of the Monterey Bay Aquarium relating "Stories from the Early Days at Lake Merritt". The 30-minute talk will be followed by questions and answers, a trivia game with prizes and discussion. REGISTER by Eventbrite at <https://lakemerrittstoriesearlydays.eventbrite.com/> to receive the Zoom link before the program Please share this with colleagues and friends!



Bulychaeva enigmatica;
Photo by Ken-ichi Ueda,
iNaturalist



Jim Covell in 1962; Photo by his father, Oakland's Municipal Naturalist, Paul Covell,

CLIMATE CORNER: CCL OR CLC? - A Guest Editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

The presidential election is over, and although control of the Senate has not been decided at the time of this writing, it is certain that new opportunities finally exist to begin a national program to slow climate change. We have a unique, once in a civilization chance to ward off the worst of what a climate gone mad can do. We must act boldly, decisively, and at an unprecedented scale the likes of which have not been seen since the fight against tyranny during World War II. To do otherwise invites creation of a planet not conducive to life as we know it, and in which food, water supplies, sea level, fires, drought and flooding will lead to mass immigration, poverty and social disruption.



More than 4 percent of California burned in 2020

Only by involving the world economy, by including social and economic justice as components, and by re-structuring how people use energy, can this be achieved. To do this, economists favor a carbon tax, which (while not a silver bullet) can be the foundation for most other actions to reduce carbon emissions.

This foundation is imbedded in economics because money and prices determine human actions. Money and prices also can provide decent wages, control international trade, stimulate innovation, and determine winners and losers in the competition for goods and services. What then, should be the price of carbon emissions?

Setting the price by cap-and-trade schemes does not work because most fees have been [set too low](#)

to have any significant impact on reducing emissions. The way to put a price on carbon emissions is by a carbon tax. To quote Amanda Shendruk (1), “Carbon pricing is [gaining popularity](#) around the globe, and it’s likely to become a talking point soon in Washington.” Janet Yellen, proposed as Secretary Treasury by Joe Biden, supports a carbon tax. But it may not deplete your wallet, because the money can be returned to us via a carbon dividend. Among the many approaches to a carbon tax, two stand out. The Climate Leadership Council (CLC) proposes an initial carbon tax of \$40 per metric ton, and an annual increase of 5%. The Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL) proposes an initial tax of \$15 per ton (which is more easily absorbed at first) and a rapidly rising annual fee of \$10, which would be more effective at lowering carbon emissions sooner. Note here that Sweden taxes carbon at \$119/ton, Canada at \$21, and Mexico at \$2/ton.

The details will of course be worked out in the congressional “sausage factory” but it is likely that the fee would be charged at the point in which carbon enters the market (the coal mine, oil well, or port of entry) and not at the cash register. It is also possible (as CCL) proposes, that 100% of the fee collected would be returned to everyone on an equal basis (leading to several hundred dollars a month for a family of four). Or, congress could provide x % for new energy jobs, or x % for a national grid which could lower energy costs for everyone. The possibilities will be certainly be debated long and hard.

A carbon tax is the method of choice for those who study how pricing can impact carbon emissions. It will be essential to achieve any goal of reducing emissions. But whatever the flavor of carbon tax sausage that is eventually chosen, the future of our climate will be determined by it. Support, and do not fear or speak out against the foundational way toward slowing the pace of climate change.

(1) https://qz.com/1937992/janet-yellen-supports-a-carbon-tax-but-what-does-that-mean/?utm_campaign=Hot%20News&utm_medium=email&hsmi=101327277&hsenc=p2ANqtz--Ew4Wg6bCqWXAhJW4hficUdaVZrFXRuLRY7vO5Fyq97IAi7YgdyJaOfzHL2tNdEEQoQWd0q0BiEXTnsojHSOIA67Isug&utm_content=101327277&utm_source=hs_email

Lost in Light at Lake Merritt - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon Society

When we assembled for the November 4th-Wednesday not-really-Golden-Gate-Audubon walk, the day seemed perfect – sunny and still, with just enough nip in the air to make a thin jacket comfortable. What could be better? Six birders joined the two leaders, and their day started with an air show: a dozen American Crows chased a young Red-tailed Hawk over the trees behind the boathouse parking lot, dipping and diving and risking occasional wing strikes. (I kept hoping the hawk would flip over and grab one, but no such luck.)

Turning back to the lake near the dome cage, the scene was properly busy for the season, with the floats full of Double-crested Cormorants, both White and Brown Pelicans, and assorted gulls, and the water lively with the same, plus American Coots, the occasional scaup, and a few Common Goldeneyes. Several Snowy Egrets patrolled the beach, but the local Green Herons stayed resolutely out of sight.

We strolled around the bird paddock, carefully studying each duck in the hope of finding the female Northern Pintail reported to be hanging out there, but no luck there either. Mallards one and all, with orange bills instead of black. The drakes were mostly Mallards too (with mustard yellow bills), except for the new white domestic ducky who's taken up residence there: huge and sparkling clean, with a brilliant gold bill. The Muscovy Duck flock is down to two or three that I can't tell apart; they're all Idaho potatoes with feet and gnarly red faces, each one lumpier than the next.

From the Nature Center shore (still sheltered by the islands and unaware of impending trouble) we spotted a seldom-spotted Spotted Sandpiper, a species last seen here last February and not for five years before that, working the rocks edging the bird paddock. As usual, it was easily identified by its completely unspotted white breast and briskly pumping rump: another member of the Bird Name Frustration Club. Yes, it sometimes does have spots – for a few weeks in the spring when it puts on its party vest – but then and the whole rest of the year, it hardly takes a step without pushing its tail down and up and down again.



Sandpipers on the Sailboat House beach, November 28th 2020; Photo by Carole Levenson

So, then we headed alongside the playground in happy innocence, looking first at the Nature Center (to admire the newly reinhabited Black Phoebe nest) and then at the inland bushes (to enjoy a flock of Lesser Goldfinches and some other small birds among the branches). Turning toward the lake, however, we found it hidden in shattered light. Reflected sun is often a problem around mid-morning, but normally it's possible to stand a short way back on the grass and avoid the glare. Not on this day, however. The sun was at the precise angle and elevation to send a blinding blast from every bit of water worth looking at to reach every bit of land worth standing on.

Knowing the problem couldn't last more than an hour, we fled to the Garden Center garden, entering through the back gate (the reverse of our usual route) and heading first for the sensory garden. There we were delighted to see that the area around the fountain rock has been replanted at last, making the long-desolate spot likely to become birdier and birdier as the vegetation grows back. No birds there at the moment, though – a flock of tiny human juveniles crowded the path and filled the air with their chatter.

The rest of the garden treated us to all the birds of the season – Titmice and Chickadees and Yellow-rumped Warblers, and one gorgeous male Townsend's Warbler showing off his black burglar mask at a neck-friendly level among the branches of the monkey puzzle tree. Both White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows fossicked among the fallen leaves, and somewhere a Nuttall's Woodpecker blew its police whistle softly as it flew invisibly from branch to branch.

One of the dawn redwoods inside the garden had brilliant auburn needles and not-cones, something we hadn't seen (or at any rate noticed) before, and the other was definitely reddish. "Are they sick?" one of the birders

asked. “No, I think it’s just that they’re deciduous and conditions are right this year.” Most years, the needles turn brown and fall off without ceremony, leaving the strings of tiny balls the trees use instead of cones hanging like sand-colored tinsel all winter. “Let’s see what the one outside the garden is doing.” (I always have to visit that one anyway, as it’s the best tree in the park, perfectly symmetrical and beautiful at all seasons.) This time it was redder than usual, though not so bright as its lumpy cousin inside the garden – something special about the temperature?

Back at the lake, the sun had moved off the firing line, so we could see again. The scaup population (both Greater and Lesser) seemed somewhat larger than in recent years – though that might be wishful thinking, and in any case was far smaller than that of a decade ago – and the Ruddy Ducks were also out in force. We saw a few Common Goldeneyes but no Barrow’s, and a few small grebes but none of the big ones.



Adult Red-tailed Hawk; Damon Tighe 2020

A mysterious raptor perched high in the tall tree behind the El Embarcadero pergola, partially hidden among the leaves, and we walked all the way down there and around the end of the lake trying to get a clear look at it. It turned out to be a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk, possibly the one from the earlier crow-fest; a single crow perched at the top of the tree peering down at it.

The area behind the line of inlet debris-catcher floats also rewarded the visit, as it was full of the Canvasbacks that had been notably absent from the rafts farther up the lake. That brought the species count back up to 46 (matching 2018, highest in recent years), despite missing the robins and several other expected birds. Which all just goes to show, wherever you look at Lake Merritt, you’re likely to see something you wouldn’t have seen if you hadn’t looked just there – which is part of what makes every day at Lake Merritt, like this one, a good day to be there.

*******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. ***

CITIZEN WATER QUALITY REPORT

Water quality was measured on December 18, 2020.

Dissolved Oxygen 5 parts per million (ppm) top/3 ppm bottom (LOW below 5 ppm E.P.A. standard at bottom)

pH 7 top/7.5 bottom (normal)

Salinity 21 parts per thousand (ppt) top/31 ppt bottom (**stratified**, less dense fresher upper layer can prevent dissolved oxygen from reaching lower saltier layer!)

Water Temperature 13 degrees Celsius top (55 degrees Fahrenheit) top/12.5 deg Celsius bottom (54 degrees Fahrenheit) (normal)

Water Clarity (Secchi) 1.5 meters (normal)



Betsy Schultz of Rotary Nature Center Friends tests for dissolved oxygen (D.O.).

Student Lake Merritt Water Quality Monitoring data collected from 1997-2013 for 5 lake stations can be viewed on <https://cd3.sfei.org/>. Funds are being raised to add the student data from 2014-2017 to the website.

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568 Bellevue Avenue
Oakland, CA 94610

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Happy Holidays!

Document named LMI New Member Application last revised 2020.07.06



Uniquely-shaped mussel shells found under a rope on the floating dock at LMBC.

Stay Safe, Stay Home, Reduce-Reuse-Recycle! Love Our Lake!!

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

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