SPRING DELUGE BRINGS TRASH TO LAKE

Although January and February were dry, March brought 6.60 inches of rain to our gage atop the Boating Center and as of April 24th, an additional 3.03 inches had fallen with more in the forecast.

Of course all this water has to go somewhere, and above Lake Merritt is a seven square mile watershed, much of it impervious (which means the water runs off rather than sinks into the ground). Down it comes, across streets, parking lots, sidewalks, and your house. Along the way it picks up whatever it can float and whatever can flow with it, including the not so nice leavings of litterbugs. Those are people who think the whole world is their own, private garbage can. You see their stuff in the gutters, especially near fast food restaurants and some corner “convenience” stores. Not only does it look bad, it costs cities hundreds of thousands of dollars (tax dollars) to clean it up. Why do we put up with them?

This is what the rain looks like after it has met with litterbug leavings, flowed into Lake Merritt and washed up on the boat ramp.

And this is what it looks like after we have cleaned it up.

CLIMATE CORNER

March, 2012; The United States of America: A stunning 15,272 daily high temperature records were broken. It was the hottest March in America’s history. Some heat records were smashed by 20 or more degrees. While not every day and every location is hotter, the climate is changing and the odds have been shifted. Climate change is here to stay, and increasing.

And of course there were also tornadoes, lots of them. As shown below, the current trend for numbers of them so far this year exceeds the 75th percentile for annual totals, and is flirting with the maximum number ever recorded in a year. By March 23rd, 319 had been counted, including four EF 4 monsters, capable of tearing the roof off a house. Thank goodness we do not have these at Lake Merritt.
If you are brave enough to see it in visual form, go to: www.climatedots.org and watch the video.

DUCKLINGS HATCH

It is that time of year again, and here they come.
Photo by Lee Aurich
BIRD COLUMN
April Not-Quite-Showers at Lake Merritt
Rain promised for the day held off, and the group that turned out for the Golden Gate Audubon fourth-Wednesday walk in April strolled along amid balmy breezes in a lovely overcast light. At first glance, it looked like the winter migrants were on their way north - but we found half a dozen species with representatives left: Bufflehead (a brown female with a white oval on her cheek), Ruddy Duck (one auburn male with blazing blue beak and two dull brown females), Greater Scaup (twenty or thirty black-headed drakes with gray backs and white wings, two or three brown females with white feathers around their beaks; some of the ones farther out could have been Lesser Scaup instead, but the differences are too small to be sure at that distance), Western Grebes (long, snaky black and white necks, sharp yellow beaks; some might have been Clark's Grebes, but none were certain), and one Horned Grebe about two-thirds of the way into breeding plumage (and remarkably scruffy for a creature that's going to look like a jeweler built it from copper and steel and gold in a week or so).

Every available spot on the bare island trees had a pair of Double-crested Cormorants nesting in it, and many had overflowed into the trees that still have leaves. (It's hard for a human to understand, but the high-rent district is out in the open, not in the shade. Proof of this observation is the way the bare branches fill up first, and the earnest adult we watched bringing stick after stick to a spot that had only a tiny fork in the branch, too small to hold one stick while the would-be nester went off for another.) We saw no babies peeking out of nests, but there should be plenty by the beginning of May.

The day's biggest delight was a party of Northern Rough-winged Swallows - probably half a dozen of the brown and cream birds, though they move too fast to be sure of a count - bringing nesting materials to tiny holes in the lake's rock siding between the islands and El Embarcadero. We rarely see swallows at all at the lake, and this is the first evidence of breeding since some Barn Swallows parked their broods on the garden fence to wait for food several years ago.

In the park across Bellevue things were also quiet, but we watched several Oak Titmice flirting their gray crests among the branches - a pleasant sight, especially since they're classed as a threatened species here - and a flock of twenty or thirty Cedar Waxwings (elegant gold-olive birds with little crests and black burglar masks) wheeled back and forth from tree to tree.

So all and all, and as always, it was a good day at Lake Merritt, where every day....

Picking up homeless trash before it gets into the Lake.
NEW OUTLET BARRIERS TO BE INSTALLED
The big, new, black and yellow storm drain outlet barrier is already in place at the Embarcadero columns and similar storm drain barriers are scheduled to be installed at outlets 51, 54, 56 and at 18th Street. The one at the mouth of Glen Echo creek is still in good shape and will not be replaced. These two foot high booms drift above the bottom and prevent floating material, such as oil, Styrofoam, plastic bottles, cigarette butts etc. etc. etc. from escaping into the Lake.

Professionally designed and installed shoreline attachment points have been included at the Embarcadero columns and boy are they nice! Multiple metal pipes hold everything in place when massive flows gush from the storm drains while several loops allow the floats to rise and fall with the tides. Against the shore, a double walled structure fits tightly against the rock, preventing even ciggie butts from escaping.

Note that soluble stuff such as paint and soap pass right under the barriers, so don’t wash your car on the street and keep that paint out of storm drains.

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE

Iris grace the water as part of our beautiful, new shoreline landscaping, courtesy of Measure DD.

Do brown pelicans appreciate the beauty?

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