

# The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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"Tidings" is an editorial newsletter. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the City of Oakland.

**IS YOUR NEWSLETTER IN COLOR?** If you have received this via the US mail, your copy is in black and white (which is because color printing is expensive). If at all possible, we would like to send this to you via email, so you can have a color copy ([Lake Merritt is in color](#)) and we can save money on printing, envelopes and stamps.

But, we may not have your email address. So, if this page you are holding is black and white and you want to see what it really looks like, send us your email address via [lmi@netwiz.net](mailto:lmi@netwiz.net). We promise not to share it with anyone else.

**PLASTIC BAG ORDINANCE NOW IN EFFECT:** In Alameda County (hey, that's us) it is now illegal for any grocery store and most other retailers in 14 local cities that sell packaged foods and alcohol to hand out free plastic bags at the checkout counter. Recycled content paper or reusable bags may be provided if the retailer charges at least ten cents per bag. Or, just bring your own bag.

Since such bags are one of the most common items in Lake Merritt Trash, we say: BRAVO!

**BEGINNING JANUARY 1, 2013**



**NO SINGLE-USE plastic bags allowed.**

**PAY for paper and reusable bags.**

**Or BRING YOUR OWN reusable bags to the store.**

**DON'T FORGET ME.**  [ReusableBagsAC.org](http://ReusableBagsAC.org)

Elsewhere - Copied from the Aquarius Systems newsletter: Delhi, India is taking a huge stand against plastics. No person can manufacture, import, store, sell, or transport any kind of plastic bag in the city; a maximum penalty of up to five years in prison plus a fine of up to \$1,807 could await violators!!!

**NEW RECREATIONAL WATER QUALITY CRITERIA:** How safe is the water? That is a question that may pop into your head as you watch toddlers splash at the Bandstand Beach or skippers in training tip their sail boats and take a dunking. The mere fact that illnesses are not reported from these activities indicates that all is well, but the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) just revised their more technical way to figure it out. Ambient water quality criteria recommendations for recreational waters were last released in 1986 and the 2012 changes are a welcome update. These recommendations are not regulations, but are designed to protect those engaging in water contact sports from such things as gastrointestinal illnesses, ear infections etc.

It is complicated, but for marine and fresh water bodies, such as Lake Merritt, the “statistical threshold value” (let the laboratory technicians determine that) of Enterococci bacteria should not be higher than 110 - 130 colony forming units per 100 milliliters of water. Colony forming units are related to those little circles you see in petri dishes that labs use in the testing procedures. Enterococci are bacteria that live in human intestines. While only a few their species are pathogenic, it is believed they provide a higher correlation to disease and to many of the human pathogens often found in city sewage than fecal coliform bacteria, which were used in older testing procedures. In other words, Enterococci are indicators for disease, not necessarily the disease causing critters themselves. For fresh water, E. coli bacteria are still the indicator of choice.

Because folks usually want to know if they can go into the water without waiting, EPA now includes a new, rapid testing procedure that states or localities can use to determine if water quality is safe within hours of samples being taken. Or, if a longer term picture is wanted, samples can be taken over a period of 30 days. In that case, the geometric mean of the samples should be no more than 30 – 35 colony forming units per 100 milliliters of sample water.

To see what levels of bacteria have been measured in Lake Merritt, go to our website, click on “About Lake Merritt” then on “Our Watershed” then on “Trash and Bacteria Totals.” These data, from 2003 and 2004, are for fecal coliform bacteria, a more general grouping that was used back then. Funding for the laboratory testing (which is expensive) was discontinued by the Alameda County in 2004.

Bacteria in Lake Merritt are most likely from waterfowl and from storm drain flows after rainfall. These micro-organisms are, in general, less likely to be associated with human disease, which is probably why illnesses are not reported here despite high levels of fecal coliform bacteria and occasional human contact with Lake water. However, because sewers sometimes overflow during very heavy rains, it is best to avoid water contact for a few days after such events.

**CLIMATE CORNER:** Will China’s sulfur haze save the world? Gwnnye Dyer doesn’t mince words. In his copyright 2011 book “*Climate Wars*” this author, historian and internationally known journalist reports on his interview with Hans-Joachim Schellnhuber, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Change Research and climate change adviser to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. China, as you may have recently read in the news, is pouring immense quantities of sulfur aerosols into our atmosphere which not only makes nice sunsets (see photo at Lake Merritt below) but also reflects sunlight back into space and cools planet



Earth. “Without this pollution, we would already have much higher global warming” he reports and since China, like the US, has not agreed to any mandatory greenhouse gas emission reductions, the haze will continue. This “global dimming” might, just might, compensate for increased carbon levels as they rise to 450-500, perhaps allowing several decades for other countries to switch to renewable energy. Then, with

careful management, sulfate emissions could be gradually lowered later in the century as carbon levels drop (which would take more than a century). Schellhuber says this would be “a very tricky game.”

If it seems surreal, perhaps it is because, as Dyer says “that is how human politics usually works.” His book is published by Oneworld Publications in Oxford, England.

The critters in Lake Merritt would not like this however, since it might also increase acid rain and change the chemistry of the water in which they live. But like it or not, it is happening.

### **HOW FLOWS GLEN ECHO CREEK?**

As part of a study to determine if nets can be installed at Glen Echo Creek to capture trash in urban runoff, flow data was collected between November 2011 and May 2012. The data provide a useful snapshot of the rainfall – runoff regime for the creek and can be used to determine design details for the proposed net structure. A draft report has been prepared, which is being reviewed by the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, and the City of Oakland Water Quality Technical Committee.



*Glen Echo Creek, just upstream of its entrance to Lake Merritt, which is shown in the background. Normally clear, the creek was contaminated with paint when this photo was taken.*

### **BIRD COLUMN:** Remarkable Visitors to the Bellevue Oaks

The Golden Gate Audubon 4th-Wednesday walkers rarely find anything interesting in the oaks between the Nature Center and El Embarcadero -- perhaps because we rarely look there. But in January, something caught someone's eye, and we found a Black-throated Gray Warbler (white with bold black markings, including a burglar's mask) bouncing around in the trees. And not alone -- we also saw a Townsend's Warbler (same description, only yellow instead of white), a Yellow-rumped Warbler (as described), a Ruby-crowned Kinglet (tiny gray-green-yellow darter with white wing bars and a partial eye ring), a couple of Oak Titmice (all gray with crests) and a Hutton's Vireo (like a slower-moving kinglet with more of an eye ring).

We'd already seen most of the usual suspects as we strolled down the lake, starting with the Tufted Duck (black back, white wings, ponytail), who was up with the scavenger flock by the Nature Center. There were several Canvasbacks there (with the ski-jump noses; males have coppery heads and white backs; females in shades of taupe and fawn), chasing each other about instead of ignoring each other as they usually do. Hank-the-rescue-Pelican had a companion, something rarely seen at this time of year, and the female Belted Kingfisher (crested and blue, with both a blue band and an orange one across the chest) sat close in on the island, observing and being observed.

All told, we saw 50 species of birds, and even though it was a gray morning with some rain, it was a very good day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day



**WILD OAKLAND'S NEXT WALK IS:** "Nature Photography Basics", February 9, high noon, meet in front of the Rotary Nature Center: Mark your calendars and tell your friends about this event with the multi-talented Damon Tighe, who also led the Wild Oakland mushroom walk in January. Damon is a freelance photographer whose work is published regularly in Bay Nature and other magazines. Bring your DSLR, digital point-and-shoot, Polaroid, bellows, or disposable cameras. For further information, point your browser to [www.wildoakland.org](http://www.wildoakland.org).

**GNOME ESCAPES, JUMPS INTO LAKE:**

You may have read about all the little gnomes that have been popping up in nearby neighborhoods lately. They have appeared at places like the bottom of light poles by the Wesley Coin Laundry and such. Well, one of them got loose and jumped into the Lake where we found (rescued?) him. He now resides at the Institute office in the company of other items our volunteers have found, such as a three hole punch, a purple backpack, a skunk, a tire, a whiskey flask and a wallet (which was returned to its now happy owner).

So join us on a Saturday at 10 am or Tuesday at 10:30 am and see what you can find.



**RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE**



*Only at Lake Merritt.  
Photo by Lee Aurich*



*Faster than a flying goose?  
(Photo by John Kirkmire)*

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