

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.

CONTRACT MAY END ON JUNE 30TH: Our contract with the City of Oakland for work at Lake Merritt is scheduled to end on June 30th, 2013, unless renewed. However, City Council Resolution 83324 allows extension for an additional two years through June 30, 2015 if the tasks in the scope of work are completed satisfactorily. We are hopeful for the extension so that the Institute may continue to exist and coordinate volunteers for Lake Merritt.

EARTH EXPO AND EARTH DAY: It was a fine spring day. Thirty five wonderful volunteers helped Lake Merritt on Earth Day, removing trash from the waters of the shoreline, scraping multitudes of barnacles from the Glen Echo fountain and painting over dastardly graffiti at the Chalet cleaning station. Many more volunteers helped out at the lake's Nature and Garden centers, weeding and cleaning up trash. What would we do without these dedicated people?

Earlier in the week, hundreds of folks participated in Earth Expo downtown where the Institute offered a penny for each cigarette butt removed from the street and brought to us. Only enthusiastic students from the Lighthouse Charter School responded, so we kept raising the bounty; 5 cents, 10, 25 then 50 cents! Still, nobody thought it high enough to stoop down and grab the nasty things. That is until a group of enterprising street people started bringing them in by the bagful. In no time we had given out almost \$50! Lesson learned: except for students and volunteers, it takes a lot of money to convince people to pick up these things.



Volunteers march into action on Earth Day



Barnacles were 2-3 inches thick on the fountain.

INSTITUTE TRUCK, OUTFALL BARRIER VANDALIZED: Some @\$%^&* crawled under our truck with a battery operated drill, put a hole on the fuel tank, used an electrical connector as a spout and drained out the gasoline (about \$35 worth) into an empty baby wipe container. Unfortunately the repair costs were in excess of \$600. Our poor truck also needs a catalytic converter, which will cost \$700 so if you have

any money left after paying taxes, we sure could use it. Donations are deductible and can be made at our website via PayPal or by sending a check to the address above. Vandals also detached the number 54 storm drain outfall barrier from both ends, raising it chest high and over the attachment pipes, which meant they were probably standing in the water. Were they trying to steal it?

The truck incident happened in the Boating Center parking lot which has become known for break ins and theft; even the gondolier lost his wallet. The Women's Rowing Club now posts a hidden security guard to watch for the culprits, cell phone and camera in hand. We hope they catch the jerks.

CLIMATE CORNER: James Hansen Retires

In the 1970s, a NASA research scientist named Dr. James Hansen noticed a sharp rise in global temperatures, prompting him to change his research focus from Venus (a planet where atmospheric carbon levels are so high that lead melts) to climate change. He labored in obscurity over the next decade, but on a blistering June day in 1988 he told a Congressional committee that human-induced global warming had begun. Speaking to reporters afterward in his flat Midwestern accent, he said what would appear in news reports across the land: "It is time to stop waffling so much and say that the evidence is pretty strong that the greenhouse effect is here." (NY Times, June, 1988).

A news archive from Columbia's Earth Institute noted that Hansen's climate analyses have been based not only on the very basic physics that goes into climate model design, but on the detailed studies of the geological ice core and isotope records that are used to constrain and confirm climate model sensitivity. In recent years Hansen has drawn attention to the danger of passing climate tipping points that could produce irreversible climate impacts, creating a different planet from the one on which civilization developed.

Dr. Hansen has retired to devote more time to his campaign to cut global carbon emissions, including expert witness testimony and possibly peaceful civil disobedience. "At my age," he said, "I am not worried about having an arrest record."



Build it and it will leak. Photo from Arkansas last month.



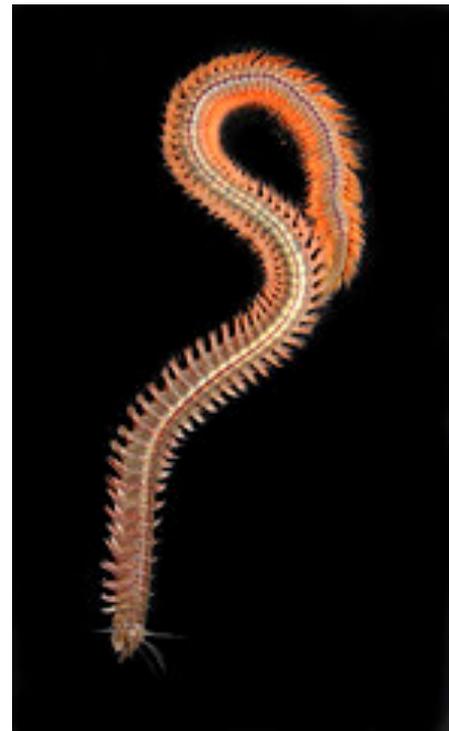
An alternative to the KXL oil pipeline.

MUD FLATS – BEAUTY OR BEAST? Neither. They are biological habitats, places that provide food and shelter for living things. And they are productive ones too, providing lots of space for varieties of life that don't do well elsewhere. Although they may look barren, closer inspection reveals a multitude of critters living below and on top of the mud. When covered by high tide, you may see puffs of sediment pulsing from a hole as the worm below clears out it's burrow. At low tide, a golden, brown sheen may cover the mud, indicative of diatoms, nature's equivalent of aquatic grasslands. Isopods, amphipods, shrimp, crabs, fish and algae also live here, which of course attracts the shorebirds, which are about all that most of us see most of the time. Indeed, without the mud flats, some shore birds would go elsewhere.

Removal of the 12th Street dam bottleneck in November now allows more water to drain from Lake Merritt during the low tidal cycle, revealing wider mud flats than we have been accustomed to seeing. Some find this disconcerting. Perhaps they prefer the bathtub style of lake, as in a Las Vegas fountain. But Lake Merritt is a wildlife refuge, the first to be established in north America way back on March 18th, 1870 when the state legislature passed the fabled act.



Above: Thousands of snails live in Lake Merritt mud flats.



Right: A polychaete worm. Some species have green blood.

Photos by Damon Tighe, who has started a photo project about invertebrates found in the mudflats at Lake Merritt.

Meanwhile, a group of biologists are planning an event to highlight emergent mudflats and their importance to the estuarine food web of our tidal lagoon. That web links all forms of lake life to each other, and to the physical environments that support them.

So fear not, this newly exposed (at low tide) habitat is protected. In fact, as the seasons progress, it will change it's mantle, soon to become green with algae and new life. And while you are walking by, keep a look out for what is down there, perhaps watching you.

BIRD COLUMN: Advancing the Season

My most memorable bird of the day showed up after the walk, as I was heading homeward past the boathouse. And it was a House Sparrow - a cock puffed up to twice his usual size, blazing with burnished auburn, ebony, and cream, and quivering his gray wings and shrieking as he hopped from branch to branch... earnestly pursued by a hen sparrow....

Out on the islands, the Double-crested Cormorants have nests in almost every available fork of the trees, and many of them still had their bunny-ear crests. See 'em while they last! One Green Heron (actually rock-gray and cinnamon) and assorted Black-crowned Night-Herons of all ages were fishing from the rip-rap, accompanied by a few Snowy Egrets and several precariously perched Canada Geese. The kingfisher was absent - as usual during the cormorant nesting season - but a Red-shouldered Hawk spent a few minutes sitting on a snag and contemplating lunch.

In the water, the Ruddy Ducks are mostly ruddy now (the drakes, that is; the hens don't change colors), and the Eared and Horned Grebes have almost all donned their party clothes. They're quite a sight, as they completely replace their soft gray winter suits with metallic-looking copper and steel, with gold fans or bands (respectively) behind their beady red eyes. I wish they'd stay here to breed, but they all go away. Hank-the-rescue-pelican's buddy also went away, leaving him to swim among the gulls like an ocean liner surrounded by tugboats.

Only a few gulls were left - Western and Ring-billed - but the Forster's Terns were out in force, diving like white-winged bombs right in front of us, and two species of swallows were bug-hunting over the lake and the nearby grass. I think the brown Northern Rough-winged Swallows are breeding in the bank again, between the tot lot and the Embarcadero Fountain, but didn't actually spot them heading into the wall.

The day was sunny and just on the edge of cool, but windy enough to keep the tree birds hiding - though we saw chickadees and titmice and most of the rest of the usual suspects by ones and twos. Forty-one species all told, which felt a little light for April, but all welcome on a good day at Lake Merritt, where every day....

STUDENTS FIND A \$10 BILL: There is was, tucked up against the wall in eight inches of water. A St. Paul's 6th grade student scooped it up in her net; our very first ten dollar bill ever found in the Lake. That's the kind of litter we like!

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE



Cormorants go punk! Photo by Lee Aurich.



Lower tides make trash removal much more difficult.

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