

The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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MEET THE NEW CO-DIRECTORS AND STAFF AT THE LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE!

By Constance Taylor



James Robinson, Co-Director

James Robinson has been working around the lake since 2005, when he started as a sailing instructor at the Lake Merritt Sailboat House. He became involved with the Lake Merritt Institute after helping Dr. Bailey with a few odd jobs, and was eventually hired as the Clean Lake Supervisor. "It all started when Doc Bailey taught me the difference between a storm drain and a sewer," James recalled when asked what piqued his interest in Lake Merritt's trash problem.

James worked at LMI while studying Environmental Science at Laney College & SF State, and was able to applying his classroom knowledge to the practical goings-on at LMI. "It was fascinating to see what was happening in Lake Merritt because of its unique aquatic environment. I was helping people test dissolved oxygen and bacteria levels in the water, and once I started cleaning the fountains I realized there was a whole other ecosystem stuck to them!"

Improving the dissolved oxygen levels in the lake is something James feels is one of the most important things LMI can do to improve the water quality. "Certain times of the year, parts of the lake have almost zero oxygen in the water. If the Lake wasn't so man-modified, all parts of the lake would get oxygen year-round." James made the point of distinguishing 'man-made' from 'man-modified'- "Lake Merritt has been here since the last ice age!" he exclaimed. "People have changed it a lot, but it's been around far longer than we give it credit for."

James is also interested in improving the aquatic environment through increased collaboration with other institutes like the Environmental Science Academy at Oakland High School and the Water Quality Control Board.

Some of his favorite things about working at Lake Merritt are being outside, interacting with the public, and teaching people things about the lake that they didn't already know. These passions were some of the driving forces that motivated him to write a children's book in 2012 called [A Bird's Tale](#), the story of an American White Pelican learning how to live in Lake Merritt, loosely based on Hank, the injured white pelican that lives at the Lake. "It can be difficult to get people to feel responsible for their actions and how they impact the lake both positively and negatively. I wrote the book to give kids, and hopefully their families, a character to relate to who would help personalize the issues of trash, water quality, and the health of the wildlife."



Carl Bailey, Co-Director

Does that last name look familiar? It should! Carl Bailey has been involved with the Lake Merritt Institute since he was ten years old and his father, Dr. Richard Bailey (former Director of the Lake Merritt Institute), would drag him down to the lake when Carl would pretend to be too sick to go to school. “I used to hate the smell of the mud and I hated picking up trash, but it grew on me as I got older and started to understand why we were doing what we were doing,” recalled Carl.

Carl grew up around Lake Merritt and has been involved in nearly every job at the Lake Merritt Institute, from volunteer to Clean Lake Supervisor to Co-Director, his current position. “It's pretty amazing to be a Co-Director after starting as a volunteer when I was a kid.”

He also remembers that Lake Merritt was much dirtier when he was growing up, and he's seen a huge positive impact over the last 15 years. “My dad has been educating people about Lake Merritt for over a decade, and I think that people are much more educated about the lake as a direct result of his work.”

Carl gained his experience by shadowing his dad as he made his rounds of the lake, and by listening to Dr. Bailey's thoughts about environmental issues and the state of affairs around Lake Merritt. “I took an environmental science class in college that sparked my interest; we were learning about marshlands and wetlands, and I could relate a lot of that to the lake. I used to think the job was only about picking up trash, but then I started to understand different parts of it- like how dissolved oxygen was an important part of water health.”

Improving the amount of dissolved oxygen in the lake's water is a priority for Carl. “No matter how hard you work at cleaning up trash, the smell is still something that people complain about. Unfortunately, it's not a trash issue, it's a dissolved oxygen issue.” The LMI has discussed installing a bubbler system in the bottom of the lake to pump in oxygen when levels are near zero, but some opposition exists because of possible aesthetic issues.

Carl is enthusiastic about beginning this chapter of his life and following in his father's footsteps. “I want to make a positive change in Oakland and do something that really benefits the community. Something that I'd like to get out of my time as Co-Director of the LMI is learning how to run a big business and a non-profit,” Carl explained. “Budgeting money, having to tell people what to do, being a boss; it's all new and a little terrifying, but I love it!”



Jesse Meade: Clean Lake Supervisor

When Jesse Meade was 14 years old, she won an award from the state of New Mexico for accumulating the most volunteer hours in her age category. “My criteria for volunteering is that it helps the environment, helps marginalized communities, or leaves a lasting improvement in the world,” Jesse explained. Fitting, then, that her experience with LMI started with her volunteering twice a week doing lake cleanups before she applied for the position of Clean Lake Supervisor.

Jesse has a strong interest in sustainable farming and restoring parks in urban areas, and has studied permaculture and land restoration. “One thing I've learned from both my experience and education is that even the smallest pieces of the environment are connected in ways that affect the world on a larger scale. The fate of a butterfly can be tied to the quality of the soil in its habitat, the quality of soil can be bound to the bacteria that live in the ground, and so on.”

Having worked at LMI for nearly a year, Jesse is now able to do something most of us would balk at- deal with massive amounts of garbage. “In one run to the dump, I might move over 1,000 pounds of trash. It's intense work, but I really love doing it. Personally, cleaning the lake is active meditation for me- I find it therapeutic, and I feel a strong connection to the lake, the land, the animals, and the people in this area. I love seeing the lake clean right after it was dirty when I arrived.”

When asked what she would do to change LMI for the better? “My goal is to shut it down!” she said with a laugh. “Just like a good doctor, I'm trying to put myself out of a job. When I pick up trash, when I supervise volunteers, when I do public education, I do it because I don't want there to be the problem of trash in the lake anymore.”



Jesse pulls a tree out of the lake!

TRASH TALLY:

- 1,200 lbs were removed in July, 2015.
- In August, 300 lbs had been removed by Aug. 23 but there were still a few tree stumps to haul away along with other trash bags... as well as one more week of picking up trash!

BIRD COLUMN: Not-Summer-Snow at Lake Merritt

By Hilary Powers

But the islands and the bird paddock beach were starred with white for the August 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk. Great and Snowy Egrets crowded the lower trees and bush tops on the islands - more of them than in almost a decade - and several young juvenile snowies flew into the paddock beach while we watched (they're just like adults except for the legs, which are sort of chartreuse from belly to toe instead of black with yellow galoshes). They looked really tiny among the flock of American White Pelicans who'd dropped in to visit Hank-the-Rescue-Bird - numbering at least 14, and probably more, given the way they kept flying in and wandering out of sight into the bushes. The Pied-billed Grebes are back for real - a big flock, looking very scruffy at the end of the breeding season - competing with the mallard drakes in eclipse plumage (brown heads rather than green) for most-disreputable-bird-on-the-lake status. The heron inventory was the full five: Black-crowned Night-Herons (both gray-black-and-white adults and streaky brown juveniles), both egrets, a juvenile Green Heron (or possibly two showing off their decorative cinnamon-and-cream necks at different times), and a lordly Great Blue Heron who flew practically overhead.

Over in the garden, we found the “magic tree” - the one currently being visited by one of the mixed flocks that patrol the woods - and saw Chestnut-backed Chickadees cavorting up and down its trunk, joined by an Oak Titmouse (all gray with a little crest), a pair of Bewick's Wrens showing off their white eyebrows, a

male Nuttall's Woodpecker (ladder back and red head), a Western Scrub Jay, and something none of us could name: a warbler-type bird most notable for being absolutely featureless. It was slightly greenish yellow on the belly and throat and yellowish green on the wings and back, with no wing bars, eye stripe, or other markings at all - or at least none to be picked out in a series of quick looks.

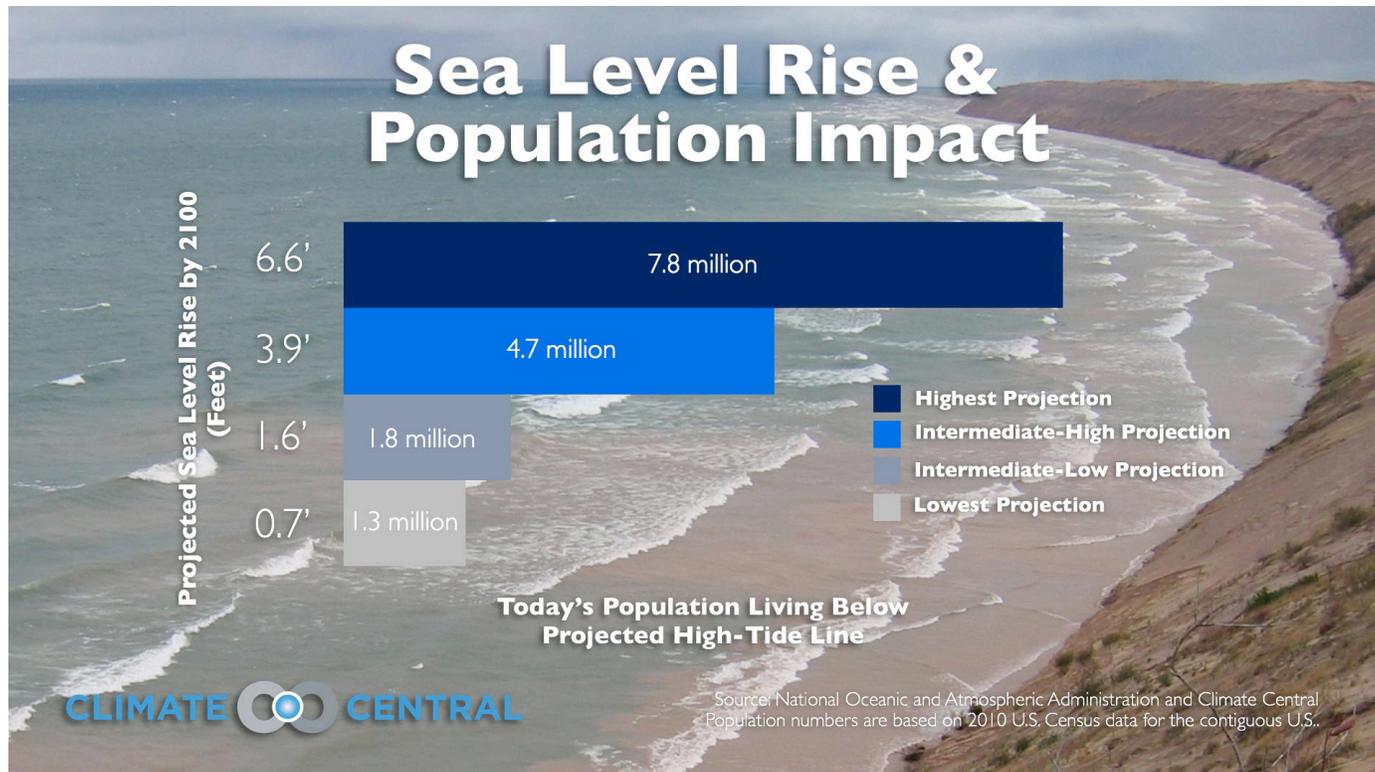
As expected for August, the number of species was very low - only 28 different kinds of birds. But such birds! Any day when a wren lands within 10 feet of your head is a good day, not that there's ever a day at Lake Merritt that isn't....

CLIMATE CORNER: A NEW INSTITUTE TO ADDRESS SEA LEVEL RISE

By Dr. Richard Bailey

Recently, the Board of Directors of "The Forum for the Future of San Francisco Bay," a dormant nonprofit based in Oakland, California, voted to amend their bylaws to transform their corporation into the "International Sea Level Institute." The Forum had been created by the Bay Planning Coalition over a decade ago, but has no legal connection with BPC. The five Directors of the new International Sea Level Institute are: Will Travis, John Coleman, Dr. Robert W. Corell, Dr. Gary Griggs, and John Englander, who will be president of this interim board, which will oversee the formulation of a business plan, identify and secure initial funding. Mr. Englander will be familiar to many of you as the author of "*High Tide on Main Street – Rising Sea Level and the Coming Coastal Crisis*" published by The Science Bookshelf in 2012 and with a forward by Jean-Michel Cousteau.

Our planet is very much in need of such an Institute, and we should be proud that it will be located in the Bay Area. Visit www.sealevelinstitute.org (under construction) to sign up for future updates.



Storms and tidal surges will greatly exceed the levels shown above.

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with funds from the City of Oakland. To contribute to the Institute, use PayPal at our website or send a check to: The Lake Merritt Institute, 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610. Mail will go to a P.O. Box, but it is going through.