“The Tidings” is an editorial newsletter. Posted opinions are not necessarily those of the City of Oakland.

JULY AT THE LAKE: SCHOOL IS OUT
WATCH OUT FOR KIDS - AND PUPS!

The intake chamber of the 7th Avenue Flood Control Pumps are becoming a great catch basin for unusual marine life. With the Measure DD funded re-opening of the clear waterway between Lake Merritt and the Oakland Estuary (See “The Tidings”; June 2016) the natural vitality of Lake Merritt will continue to improve. On June 13th the elephant seal pup at left was carried into the chamber by strong tidal inflow. The pup, a rare find as the last elephant seal sighting in the East Bay was approximately 30 years ago, was discovered by David Buller, a maintenance diver with Coastal Diving (photo credit: David Buller). The young pup energetically barked for, as well as gladly ate, all the fresh Chinatown fish David could afford to offer. When the tidal flow went slack, the well satisfied pup happily departed.

CLIMATE CORNER – WHY TRUMP MAY PROVIDE THE BEST SOLUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE – Richard Bailey, PhD., Founder Board Member – Even though Trump said our California drought is not real, our planet is freezing, and global warming is a hoax, the election of Donald Trump could be a blessing in disguise for efforts to slow climate change. How? Consider that, if elected, a few months into his term there may well be a constitutional crisis of some sort (impeachment, coup, etc.) and he would go back to his soap box. Then consider that the threat of his presidency might have resulted in so many people voting Democratic, that Democrats would retake the Senate, and perhaps even the House of Representatives. With majorities there, and with young progressives pushing a new president, realistic climate change legislation that puts a significant tax on carbon emissions (and returns the revenues to every citizen via a carbon dividend) has a good chance of passing. Thus, more effective tax legislation would replace the current Wall St. inspired, commodities market like, un-auditable cap-and-trade system now in place. Already there is a bipartisan climate caucus in Congress, and the numbers of economists, scientists, and informed people supporting a simple, straightforward tax on carbon is growing every day.

Even though a Trump presidency would be awful, it would not be as bad as climate change. Broken politics can be fixed, a corrupt economy can be corrected, and injustices can be remedied. But polar ice cannot be refrozen, methane from melting permafrost cannot be put back into the ground, and sea level rise cannot be lowered.
Only a force as powerful as the world economy can reduce carbon emissions enough, AND provide economic incentives to remove greenhouse gas from the air to the extent that the warming will slow down over a period of decades, or longer. If the specter of a Trump presidency results in Democratic majorities on Congress, and if the people lead, we just might have a chance of meaningful climate legislation that would make a difference.

Left: Graphic of uncontrolled methane release from the ocean floor as is now happening at numerous locations along the northwest coast (www.washington.edu)

LAKE MERRITT AND HUMANKIND’S GREATEST REVOLUTION – University students of Ecology, Geography, Sociology, Environmental Design, Philosophy, and the like are usually required to take a course or two that teaches the history of humankind’s relationship with nature. In short, what they learn from both the early Classical and later European perspectives is that it was all-out war! Nature was simply a wild and horrid thing that was out to hurt if not consume man, and thus wild superstitious beliefs reigned. Dark, cloud-enshrouded mountain tops were the domain of frightening evil spirits; dense forests were full of yet more evil and terrifying beasts - all out to prey upon man. Even lakes and marshes released fogs of mysterious fumes and magical gases capable of causing great harm.

Alpha predators ruled the lands, rivers, and seas. Animals of all kinds ravaged crops and/or livestock. Plagues of locust and other insects could consume a year’s crop production in a few days. Mosquitoes, parasites, and other vectors brought illness and death to loved ones. Blights darkened orchard trees and wilted plants - just as their bounties were nearing harvest. Even foods, which following tremendous efforts, man had managed to successfully harvest, clean, preserve, and store, were still at great risk. Rodents and other vermin gnawed into food-stores both raiding stocks and polluting the remainders. Pantry pests were insidious in their ability to find precious stored grains (Your great-grandmother’s heirloom flour sifter wasn’t so much about smooth cakes as it was about checking for egg-sacks, squirming larva, dead insects, and their fecal matter). Microbia could infect stored foods with toxic molds and render an entire winter’s worth of precisely preserved barrels of vegetables and meat inedible – and in times when such losses meant starvation. ....And then moths ate holes in your clothing!

It comes as no wonder then that man would seek to conquer nature by poking, swatting, stabbing, spearing, clubbing, snaring, trapping, drowning, shooting, and/or poisoning any wild living thing within range; as well as pacify every reachable acre of land by cutting, slashing, burning, draining, filling, leveling, and plowing. Even in the sophisticated worlds of Europe’s many royal gardens such as France’s Palace of Versailles (left), the formal designs were clearly meant to demonstrate man’s great superiority and domination over nature. These impressive gardens boasted trees that were sorted and planted into straight lines, trimmed into perfect cones, with hedges cut so sharply they resembled air-conditioning ductwork, shrubs cut to perfect spheres, vines tightly lashed onto complex lattice forms, and all arranged in massive geometric patterns of grids, diamonds, flor-de-lis, etc. Again, all only really meant to be examples of total human domination; no less so than chimpanzees in clown suits riding bicycles or tigers leaping through flaming hoops: all man’s pawns.

(Continued)
In “Alta California” the old war played on in fine fury. When the Episcopal Bishop, Dr. William Taylor, arrived by sailing ship at the Golden Gate in the Gold Rush year of 1849 he described the following, “Alas, the land we longed for. Over us were the brightest skies we had ever seen, around us were myriads of ducks and pelicans, and other fowl of vast variety. Beneath us were several whales spouting and playing about our ship…. A number of passengers on board drew revolvers from their coats and fired into their backs...” !?!

The Gold Rush population explosions in the Bay Area and across the state triggered a desperate rush for animal protein. San Francisco Bay, documented by both Spanish and American explorers as having the highest densities of geese, ducks, and other aquatic birds ever seen, was harvested with abandon. “When the flocks took flight the sound was deafening; the masses darkened the skies”. Specially developed, wide-bore shotguns fired so much buck-shot that they could regularly down 40 – 60 birds with a single blast. Egg hunters poured over the coastal cliffs, shoreline rock outcrops, the Farallons, and other islands, pulling every egg from every nest they could find. Cormorant eggs were favored. If the chicks had already hatched, swift crushing with boot heels guaranteed that the parents would lay replacement eggs all the sooner. Our marvelous Cormorants were brought to near extinction, and within a decade the declines in all bird populations were startlingly obvious. On land, the state’s great herds of elk, antelope, and deer, numbering in the tens of thousands, were prime targets. Between about 1850 and 1870, both the elk and antelope had been hunted to the brink of extinction, and later seven sub-species of grizzly bears were blown over the edge.

Nevertheless, in spite of Homo Sapiens Sapiens’s 50,000-year evolutionary history of fearing and battling nature, the next step in evolution was about to evolve into something quite revolutionary. In the mid-1800’s many were beginning to see a new light. A growing minority of influential people were gaining comfort with themselves and their situations, and thus becoming more confident with their standings in the natural world. They began to believe that nature was actually OK, beautiful, and even calming; and, since the old war was over, and human kind had clearly won it, a continuation of hostilities was really unjustifiable abuse.

Thus, in the 19th century, the English Garden and Craftsman Architectural Movements arose in relative parallel. The English Garden was a celebration of the diverse appearance of natural landscapes. The gardens were “natural”, albeit supported, enhanced, and idealized. No more plants trimmed into rectilinear forms! In the 20th century these movements came to the US as evidenced in the design work of Stickley, Wright, Hubbard, and others. Honesty, simplicity, and usefulness displaced the overly busy, frenetic design details of the Victorian Era. Woodwork, stone, and other natural materials were brought into the home and featured.

In the US, California led the charge. Galen Clark and others lobbied to protect Yosemite Valley from development; ultimately leading to President Abraham Lincoln’s signing the Yosemite Grant in 1864. Later, John Muir led a successful movement to include the greater area of park land we see today. Although many details of what a “park” was to be were not clear (grazing and hunting were still allowed), this success paved the way for the eventual establishment of the United States National Park Service and clear policies of total preservation.

The Yosemite Grant was extraordinary in that it was the first instance of park land being set aside specifically for preservation and public use by action of the U.S. federal government, and set a precedent for the 1872 creation of Yellowstone as the first true national park in the US, and indeed the entire world. The revolution was on. Humankind was learning a new role as protector and steward of the “beautiful” wild.

In Oakland, in 1870, Mayor Samuel Merritt succeeded in rallying civic and political support to declare Lake Merritt a formal Wildlife Sanctuary – the absolute first in the USA. The lake would become a safe refuge for resident flora and fauna, as well as a place of respite and rejuvenation for the many thousands of birds travelling the west coast flyway – then a remarkable achievement; indeed revolutionary.

In May 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt arrived in the Bay Area and then camped with Muir near Glacier Point for three days. On that trip, Muir convinced Roosevelt to take control of the Yosemite Grant lands away from the state and give it to the federal government. In 1906, Roosevelt signed the bill.
Carrying on the work of his famous family, Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr. became a champion of wildlife conservation efforts across America, and his efforts as a consultant supported the US government in the passage of the National Park Service Organic Act (1916). Thus, his words are preserved in this extraordinarily progressive document: "To conserve the scenery, and the natural and historic objects, and the wild life therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

There are now 1,200 national parks established in over 100 nations of the world. Humankind is indeed in the midst of the greatest revolution of its existence; a 180 degree course change towards enjoying, respecting, supporting, and living in balance with nature. Where we are in this arc of turn is admittedly debatable. Man has indeed come “way about”, but also known is there are many degrees of turn yet needed to reach the new heading (i.e. solving global warming). However, absolutely undebatable is that one of the very first, governmentally sanctioned, points of course change was our very own Lake Merritt.

**WHITE PELICANS SOAR AT LAKESIDE PARK – Hilary Powers** - Breath-catching sight for the June 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon bird walk: five American White Pelicans cruising in an aerial ballet over the garden, turning slow rising circles and shifting positions in what looked for all the world like careful choreography. Perhaps they were coming to join the two we'd seen swimming in the lake.

Someone asked when we'd see Brown Pelicans, and said I wasn't sure, but more likely in the spring. Then I put the scope on the floats and said, "Well, I can now testify that one of the months they show up is June!" One was hunched out there in a long lump, doing a sterling imitation of a meatloaf. Then a passer-by stopped to ask wistfully if we ever saw kingfishers at the lake, saying she'd seen one 20 years ago in Colorado but never here, despite living nearby for 30 years. "Come back in the winter," I told her, explaining they're always here then, but don't come around when the cormorants are nesting. So she wandered away. I then looked through the scope and turned to run after her shouting "Come back! Come back!" For the first time ever in June, we had a Belted Kingfisher (a female, showing off her orange cummerbund) sitting on top one of the now-branchless dead trees. "Wow," says another birder, "Show me a Black Tern!" But ya can't have everything....

The lake was down to its summer minimum: Canada Geese without flight feathers and Mallards in eclipse plumage (no green heads), plus two early black coots and one lone lorn Pied-billed Grebe. On the other hand, we saw all five of the likely herons: Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets (yellow beak and black feet vs. black beak and yellow feet), and a Great Blue Heron close enough together to see in one binocular field, plus Black-crowned Night-Herons of all ages (black, gray, and white vs. brown and variously streaky) and two Green Herons (mainly gray, cinnamon, and cream) flying and flirting with each other. Swallows - both Violet-green and Northern Rough-winged (green and white vs. brown and white) - were out in force, more than any of us had ever seen at the park, vacuuming up bugs over every patch of lawn. That still left plenty for the horde of Black Phoebes to snarf down and carry off to their youngsters, surely more nests than the one we observed on the wall of the nature center. Only 32 species all told, but such delights - definitely one of the best days Lake Merritt has to offer in its string of lovely days...

**EDITOR: Ray Perman** - “The Tidings” is published entirely with private funding donated to LMI, and not with funds from the City of Oakland. To contribute to LMI, use PayPal at the LMI website (lakemerrittinstitute.org) or send a check to: Lake Merritt Institute, 568 Bellevue Ave., Oakland, CA 94610