

THE TIDINGS



LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

568 Bellevue Ave., Oakland, CA 94610-5026; (510) 238-2290; lmi@netwiz.net; www.lakemerrittinstitute.org
A community based, non-profit corporation, established 1995; IRS Code 501(c)(3); EIN 94-3214160

VOLUME XXVI

JANUARY 2021

ISSUE I

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

Optimism Surges But So Does the Virus - Stay Safe!

The inauguration of a new President and a Vice President from Oakland (!), a federal Covid plan and approval of new vaccines have all encouraged our pandemic-weary citizens to dream about a return to normal.

Unfortunately, that hope is a long way off. It is important to continue wearing masks, social distancing and avoiding gatherings even if one is vaccinated, according to Alameda County guidelines. The need to remain vigilant is underscored by the appearance of new mutant strains of the Coronavirus.



Socially-distanced bird watchers on 4th Wednesday bird walk; Photo by Lyla Arum.

Lake Merritt Institute resumed Clean Lake activities, carefully monitored by Executive Director James Robinson, according to our Covid Plan. Events and gatherings are still prohibited. Stay safe, everyone, for the sake of our community and your own health.

Ebony and Ivory Find a New Home- People are indeed “for the birds.” The black and white domestic ducks that hung out near Outfall #56 by the Cathedral since last March, a.k.a. Ebony and Ivory, delighted lake-walkers and LMI’s A-Team volunteers alike. Amid concern for their health and safety, Oakland resident, Dawn Rogers, captured the pair on January 3rd and took them to [Rancho Compasión](#), a nonprofit farm animal sanctuary in Nicasio where she serves on the board of directors.

At right: Ivory with scarred bill in June 2020; Photo by Anthony Sarkiss, <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/48411585>



LMI in DECEMBER: 4050 gallons of trash were removed from the lake by staff and volunteers in DECEMBER. Total gallons collected in 2020 is **32,190 gallons**.

LMI Director James Robinson and Staff hosted **68 volunteers** and attended 1 meeting. **0.83 inches** rain were recorded by LMI rain gauge gauge (average rainfall in January is 4.57 inches)

You can read about the ducks' rescue, rehabilitation and loving forever home at <https://oaklandside.org/2021/01/04/lake-merritt-duck-rescue-ebony-ivory/> and <https://thebolditalic.com/the-lake-merritt-duck-couple-that-stole-oaklands-heart-94eb3bed345f>

Dumping unwanted birds has long been a problem at the Wildlife Refuge (Jim Covel, Lakeside Chat #2, <https://youtu.be/zPSWtS0-xb8>). Not only is it usually catastrophic for the dumped birds, domestic fowl can transfer avian diseases from agricultural flocks to the wild bird population in the Refuge.

THE FIRST FLUSH ARRIVES: The “first flush” is the first big rain event of the season (usually occurring between Oct-Jan). The rain water flows across city streets and hills washing a year’s accumulated dirt and trash into the storm drain system. This urban run-off eventually ends up in local waterways like Lake Merritt. Oakland had only 2.4 inches of rain as of mid-January 2021. Normally, Oakland receives 9.42 inches up to that date, so LMI knew that the trash was out there, sitting in the storm drains throughout the lake’s seven- square-mile watershed waiting to be washed into Lake Merritt. When the first atmospheric river storm hit, our staff and volunteers were ready with cameras & nets. See [livestream video](#) by Richard James Wed, 27 Jan 2021 14:20:00 -0800 of the storm drain Outfall 56 by the Cathedral. The video includes interview with LMI Executive Director James Robinson.



<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CKkGQIrkK9q/?igshid=o4vmetlrxh64>
(<https://www.cnrfc.noaa.gov/awipsProducts/RNORR4RSA.php>)

THE CLEAN LAKE PROGRAM HAS RE-OPENED!

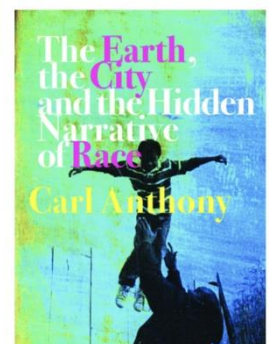
LMI’s Executive Director and Board of Directors have resumed weekly trash removal operations in accordance with Alameda County and City Covid-19 regulations. The A-Team is back in action in time for the rainy season. If you would like to join the A-Team and other experienced volunteers who remove trash from the water at Lake Merritt, email James Robinson at lmi@netwiz.net. He will arrange for your training by an experienced volunteer. If you would like to bring a group of volunteers or use the U-Clean-It stations, contact James at lmi@netwiz.net or call the LMI office at (510) 238-2290 and leave a message so that he can explain our policy for volunteering and assist you in proper training to participate in the Clean Lake Program.

FEBRUARY’S LAKESIDE CHAT, the 3rd free monthly online talk on a variety of Lake Merritt topics, sponsored by [Rotary Nature Center Friends](#), will welcome Carl Anthony and Dr. Paloma Pavel in an interactive talk entitled "The Earth, The City, and the Hidden Narrative of Race." Register at: <https://lakesidechat3-carlantonhyanddrpavel.eventbrite.com>
The 30-minute talk will be followed by questions and answers, a trivia game with prizes and discussion.
Please share this with colleagues and friends!

Breakthrough Communities
Promoting Sustainability and Justice in Metropolitan Regions



Carl Anthony & Paloma Pavel



APRIL’S LAKESIDE CHAT will feature **The Lake Merritt Institute’s Dr. Richard Bailey and Vanessa Pope of MudLab**. Find Eventbrite links for future Lakeside Chats at [Rotary Nature Center Friends](#).
<https://sites.google.com/view/stem-at-lake-merritt/home>

To all our subscribers: If you receive a hard copy newsletter in the mail, or pick it up from a coffee shop, library or the volunteers at the You-Clean-It boxes, please consider switching your paid subscription from a print version of The Tidings to an electronic version. The Tidings will be emailed to you instead of snail mailed. This will help the LMI save on the cost of paper and envelopes, printing and postage, and the photos are in COLOR! A-Team volunteers must meet in person to stuff newsletters into envelopes each month. To request the email version please email lmi@netwiz.net with “Requesting email version” in the subject line.

CLIMATE CORNER: SOCIALISM / CAPITAL DAMAGE / WHY AND HOW

- A Guest Editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

Socialism: Sometimes there are no better words to express the links between socialism and our climate emergency than what someone else has already written. So please, open this link to:

Republicans Propping Up the Fossil Fuel Industry Is Borderline Socialist

By Shi-Ling Hsu

<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/12/republicans-fossil-fuel-industry-crony-capitalism.html>

Who are the real socialists? What is the real threat to us? What is crony capitalism? Why must we change, and what is at risk if we don't? Dr. Hsu explains the threat to us from socializing the cost of pollution by propping up the fossil fuel industry with tax dollars. What environmental disasters have occurred due to government support of industries with little controls? Consider: Chernobyl, the death of the Aral Sea, smog and the lack of potable water in China. If the cost of fossil fuel pollution were truly borne by the industry, their products would gradually succumb to competition from renewable energy sources. This needs to happen if we are to have a livable climate.

Shi-Ling Hsu is known to some in the Bay Area as a former deputy city attorney for the City and County of San Francisco. Among his degrees are a Ph.D. from the University of California, Davis. He is currently a Professor of Law and Associate Dean for Environmental Programs at the Florida State University, and a member of the advisory board of Citizens' Climate Lobby.

The Next Disaster in Washington, DC?

Compared to the events of this month, the next calamity in Washington, DC might cause even more damage, as shown in this illustration from "Stormy, A Novel of Climate Change." Indeed, the physical damage from a hurricane heading up the Potomac River from the Chesapeake Bay could topple the Washington Monument and endanger numerous members of Congress. Just as Hurricane Sandy flooded New York City subways, such a storm could wreak havoc on our nation's capital.

The quest to break our addiction to fossil fuels has begun. We can continue by stopping government support of them.

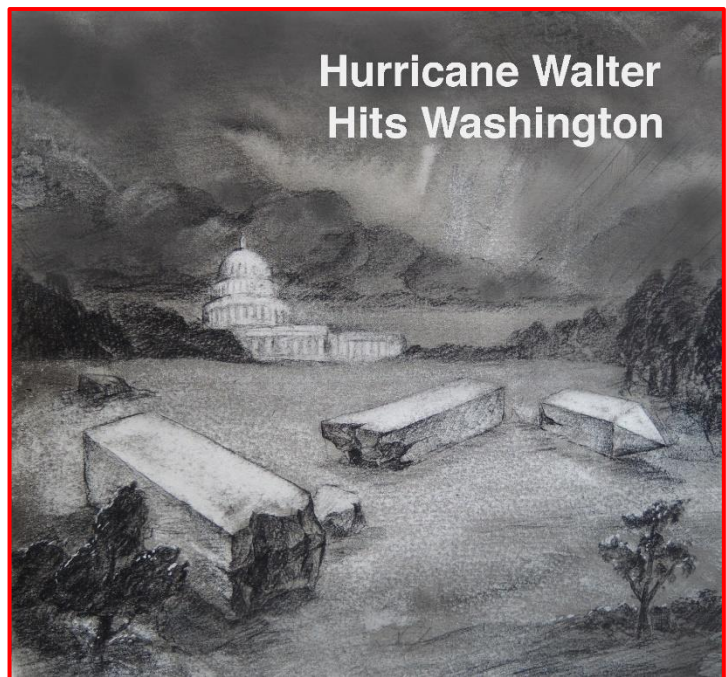
Why and How? It has become painfully obvious that many of the same sources that have

contributed to climate denial are also contributing to the obstruction of our government. Our nation's capital has not been breached for over a century. What has changed in that time that allows the dissemination of disinformation, lies, and conspiracy theories? Unrestrained social media which has blossomed in recent decades, has been both a powerful source of good, but also a medium for cancerous information (climate change is a hoax, the virus is a hoax, the election was stolen, etc.). If the unfettered use of such platforms continues, efforts to combat climate change, the virus, and indeed democratic government itself will be severely undermined.

The changes made to reign in lies and distortions must be in proportion to the threats from them.

Given the climate horrors of 2020, and takeover of the Senate chamber by rioters, we are clearly not holding the reins tight enough.

The presidential election is over and although control of the Senate has not been decided at the time of this writing, it is certain that new opportunities finally exist to begin a national program to slow climate change. We have a



unique, once in a civilization chance to ward off the worst of what a climate gone mad can do. We must act boldly, decisively, and at an unprecedented scale the likes of which have not been seen since the fight against tyranny during World War II. To do otherwise invites creation of a planet not conducive to life as we know it, and in which food, water supplies, sea level, fires, drought and flooding will lead to mass immigration, poverty and social disruption.



More than 4 percent of California burned in 2020

Only by involving the world economy, by including social and economic justice as components, and by re-structuring how people use energy, can this be achieved. To do this, economists favor a carbon tax, which (while not a silver bullet) can be the foundation for most other actions to reduce carbon emissions.

This foundation is imbedded in economics because money and prices determine human actions. Money and prices also can provide decent wages, control international trade, stimulate innovation, and determine winners and losers in the competition for goods and services. What then, should be the price of carbon emissions?

Setting the price by cap-and-trade schemes does not work because most fees have been [set too low](#)

to have any significant impact on reducing emissions. The way to put a price on carbon emissions is by a carbon tax. To quote Amanda Shendruk (1), “Carbon pricing is [gaining popularity](#) around the globe, and it’s likely to become a talking point soon in Washington.” Janet Yellen, proposed as Secretary Treasury by Joe Biden, supports a carbon tax. But it may not deplete your wallet, because the money can be returned to us via a carbon dividend. Among the many approaches to a carbon tax, two stand out. The Climate Leadership Council (CLC) proposes an initial carbon tax of \$40 per metric ton, and an annual increase of 5%. The Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL) proposes an initial tax of \$15 per ton (which is more easily absorbed at first) and a rapidly rising annual fee of \$10, which would be more effective at lowering carbon emissions sooner. Note here that Sweden taxes carbon at \$119/ton, Canada at \$21, and Mexico at \$2/ton.

The details will of course be worked out in the congressional “sausage factory” but it is likely that the fee would be charged at the point in which carbon enters the market (the coal mine, oil well, or port of entry) and not at the cash register. It is also possible (as CCL) proposes, that 100% of the fee collected would be returned to everyone on an equal basis (leading to several hundred dollars a month for a family of four). Or, congress could provide x % for new energy jobs, or x % for a national grid which could lower energy costs for everyone. The possibilities will be certainly be debated long and hard.

A carbon tax is the method of choice for those who study how pricing can impact carbon emissions. It will be essential to achieve any goal of reducing emissions. But whatever the flavor of carbon tax sausage that is eventually chosen, the future of our climate will be determined by it. Support, and do not fear or speak out against the foundational way toward slowing the pace of climate change.

(1) https://qz.com/1937992/janet-yellen-supports-a-carbon-tax-but-what-does-that-mean/?utm_campaign=Hot%20News&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=101327277&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--Ew4Wg6bCqWXAhJW4hficUdaVZrFXRuLRY7vO5Fyq971Ai7YgdyJaOfzHL2tNdEEQoQWd0q0BiEXTnsojHSOIA67Isug&utm_content=101327277&utm_source=hs_email

A Note from The Tidings Editor: “Socialist” is a poorly defined term in our current political discourse. It was a slur used by the Trump campaign against Democrats in 2020. The Editor notes that President Biden was able to win the election only with the support of Democratic Socialist Bernie Sanders and his supporters

<https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2020-primary-forecast/>.

According to Data Download on Meet The Press approximately 17% of congressional members are Bernie

Democrats, 17% are old-school Biden Democrats, 17% are old-school Republicans and 17% are Trump-aligned, leaving both major parties with serious unity issues. <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/what-if-america-s-four-political-parties-99938373807>. The Hsu article decries a “planned economy” equating it with Soviet totalitarianism, but our economy has been planned since its founding (Federal Bank). What has changed is who is doing the planning for whom. Scandinavian countries successfully use policies that the author would probably call “socialism”, and have better outcomes in health than we do.

The Big Wind by Susan Campodonico, A-Team Volunteer Representative

In the wake of a giant windstorm on a recent Monday, there was lots of clean-up going on at Lake Merritt, besides the usual trash. Snow Park required cleanup of a giant tree which were blown down by those surly winds. At the other end of the lake the lawns were 'littered' with twigs and branches of all sizes and shapes scattered wildly about. A few creative and resourceful Oaklanders decided it was an opportunity to make art. As the Embarcadero continues to be a music magnet for the drum circles, it became a sculpture garden as well.

See below for the three twig sculptures walkers have been able to enjoy on the grass at the Embarcadero.



CITIZEN WATER QUALITY REPORT

Water quality was measured on December 8th, 2020 before the “first flush” at the Glen Echo Creek inlet to Lake Merritt.

Dissolved Oxygen 6-7 parts per million (ppm) (Meets EPA standard)

Salinity 25 parts per thousand (ppt) top/27 ppt bottom (**normal before rainy season**)

Water Clarity (Secchi) > 0.58 meters (normal)

At right, St. Paul’s Episcopal Middle School teacher and his students measure water clarity with a Secchi disk.



Student Lake Merritt Water Quality Monitoring 20-year data set will soon go up on <https://cd3.sfei.org/> and the State Water Boards thanks to funds donated by LMI. The Lake Merritt Institute mentors this citizen science project and is the sponsoring organization. Thank you, LMI, for supporting K12-community college education.

Close Encounters at Lake Merritt - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon Society

Birds are usually masters of social distancing: if you're there, they're not. But something – pandemic frustration? – was in the air for the December 4th-Wednesday (Non) Golden Gate Audubon walk at Lake Merritt this year, and it wasn't affecting the humans. Only six birders joined the leaders (who'd discussed splitting the group if it got too large), and all seemed extra-attentive to the need to not-get-stupid with vaccines in sight.

The birds, on the other hand.... I lost track of the number of times a small bird – a Chestnut-backed Chickadee, a Yellow-rumped Warbler, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, even a black-masked Townsend's Warbler – landed at eye level, close enough to see every feather without binoculars, and others in the group had the same luck. One warbler came so close to another birder it seemed about to jump onto her arm. Bewick's Wrens hopped cheekily within ten or a dozen feet, and White-crowned Sparrows ignored us as we walked past their flocks. The shady oval under the oak by the garden composting station was especially rewarding; besides a mixed party of bug hunters, a male Anna's Hummingbird flew into the center and hovered, swiveling in mid-air as though checking out the humans for possible nectar.



Photo by John Kirkmire



Photo by Lee Aurich

The view from the starting point (the boathouse parking lot) included four of the five expected herons: both Great and Snowy Egrets, all age phases of Black-crowned Night-Heron, and a Great Blue Heron slouching hip-deep in leafy branches, where some argued it was just another Black-crowned. (It eventually settled the question by turning its head far enough to reveal the gold bill, but the back view with the head tucked down and the legs out of sight made it a real question.) We also got good looks at some Common Goldeneyes from there, including two brilliant black-and-white males chasing each other back and forth,

and also two Red-breasted Merganser drakes swimming and diving along the floats, one a bit scruffy looking but the other in crisp green cap, white collar, and rust-red shirt front.

In the bird paddock, the Northern Pintail duck reported but not seen last month was hanging out in the near corner of the first pond with two Northern Shovelers, a duck and a drake just beginning to put on his party clothes. Both species are very rare visitors to the lake, the last (and first) shoveler showed up in January of this year, and the last pintail sighting was in January 2019. In breeding plumage, the males of both are knock-your-eye-out gorgeous; these three birds were best distinguished from the crowd of female Mallards by their bills – black and pointy for the pintail and ridiculously long and, um, shovel-shaped for the shovelers.



Photo by Adrian Cotter

The water in front of the nature center featured some Canvasbacks, more American Coots, and a few scaup. We don't see many scaup of either species up here these days, since the official feedings stopped, so it was pleasant to have them close enough to point out the details of head shape and bill markings that said these were Lesser Scaup (size won't do it) and what to look for to identify the Greater ones.

A few American White Pelicans lingered on their usual island, but the Brown Pelicans were gone, as they

usually are in December (we haven't seen them at this time of year since 2015). The whites will probably be gone next month, too – Hank-the-rescue-pelican just never gets year-round company.

The big treat along the eastern islands was a Spotted Sandpiper that landed on the wooden wall and then strolled up the dirt toward one of the trees, pumping its tail and looking for whatever it is Spotted Sandpipers look for away from their usual water's-edge haunts. Bugs, probably, bugs are tasty and creep everywhere....

Heading toward El Embarcadero, we saw all the usual suspects in the big rafts – lots of Greater and Lesser Scaup, lots of Ruddy Ducks and coots, a fair number of Canvasbacks, Pied-billed Grebes, and Eared Grebes. No Horned Grebes this month (unlike November, when it was all Horned and no Eared), but we did get the first big grebe since last April, probably a Western, which looks like a giant Horned Grebe, so it all evens out.

The day was brilliant, just on the edge of chilly, and the advancing season had moved the sun out of last month's laser attack mode. And we saw lots and lots of birds – back to 48 species (matching 2018's four-year record), despite missing Oak Titmice and several other seasonal regulars – so it was a very good last hurrah for a year very grim everywhere but Lake Merritt.

*******AUDUBON BIRDWALKS AT THE LAKE:** Join bird expert Hilary Powers any fourth Wednesday of the month for a free “Bird walk” at the lake. Muster at the geodesic bird cage near the Nature Center at 9:30 a.m. for what are always fascinating introductions to lake birdlife. ***

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TIME TO MAKE A CHARITABLE DONATION TO THE LAKE MERRITT

The Lake Merritt Institute is a 501(c)3 non-profit charity, founded in 1992. We educate the public about urban runoff and involve them in solving the problem. Result: Volunteers remove [thousands of pounds](#) of lake trash are removed each year that would otherwise increase the world ocean's plastics crisis *and* Oakland's regulatory liability for water quality.

LMI is funded by the City of Oakland and by donations from caring people like you. Help us preserve our beautiful and hard-working lake in the heart of downtown Oakland. A membership application is at the end of this issue.

Please direct questions and comments to The Tidings Editor, Katie Noonan, at ktnoon@aol.com.

“The Tidings” is published by the Lake Merritt Institute (LMI) 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 94610-5026. LMI is a California State non-profit corporation; IRS Code 501(c)(3): EIN 94-



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\$35 Cormorant (newsletter available via electronic mail only at this level)

The following membership levels include **either** email newsletter, **or** paper copy via US mail

Please circle your preference: email or US Mail

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