

# THE TIDINGS



LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

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A community based, non-profit corporation, established 1995; IRS Code 501(c)(3); EIN 94-3214160

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

## NEW LIFE ...AND DEATH IN THE WILDLIFE REFUGE

As described by Dr. Richard Bailey in [“A Year in the Life of Lake Merritt”](#)<sup>1</sup> (2002) the months of April and May bring new life to the nation’s first wildlife refuge with the next generations of Canada Geese and Mallard ducks. This pandemic year is no exception.

Death too is a natural part of the annual cycle of life. The spring breeding season can be tough. In early May, eight dead water birds were found at the shoreline including five Double-crested Cormorants, two Snowy Egrets and one Black-crowned Night Heron. The cause of these deaths has not been determined.



Canada Goose family -Photo by Kerstin Fermin.



Photo by Lyla Arum

What should you do if you find a dead or injured animal at the lake?

Remember that animals in the Wildlife Refuge are **protected!** Contact an agency authorized to help. The Rotary Nature Center and The Lake Merritt Institute do not accept injured animals.

- Contact **OAK311** for next steps including removal. Take a smartphone photo, if possible, to help identify species and context.
- Contact City Animal Service to find organizations that provide emergency help to injured wildlife (<https://www.oaklandanimalservices.org/>). For Turtle Rescue call 510-886-2946.
- For wild resident or migratory species, submit a [Mortality Report](#) to the CA Department of Fish & Wildlife. The CDFW collects mortality data and in some circumstances does a necropsy (autopsy of an animal) to find out the cause of death (<https://wildlife.ca.gov/>).

**What can YOU do to protect the health of wildlife at the lake?** Healthy wildlife depends on a healthy lake. YOU can join forces with other caring citizens like and become a member of **The Lake Merritt Institute (LMI)**. You can join our Clean Lake Program volunteers for weekly clean-ups (email Executive Director James Robinson at lmi@netwiz.net). You can make a tax-exempt charitable donation to LMI to support our work.

LMI removes tens of thousands of gallons of trash yearly that can entangle and sicken wildlife. We respond to illegal dumping of objects of all sizes including e-scooters, cars, needles and chemicals entering through storm drains. Use the membership and donation form at the end of this newsletter or visit [lakemerrittinstitute.org](http://lakemerrittinstitute.org).

<sup>1</sup> Available for download here: <https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/detailed-evaluations/>

**LMI in APRIL: 4,350 gallons** of trash were removed from the lake by staff and volunteers in APRIL. Twenty-eight used hypodermic needles were removed. Total trash collected to date in 2021 is **19, 860 gallons**.

LMI Director James Robinson hosted **93 volunteers**, attended 3 meetings and gave a presentation.

**0.08 inches** rain recorded recorded by LMI by rain gauge (replaced after vandalism)

**THANK YOU!** The Lake Merritt Institute thanks everyone for loving Lake Merritt and --in advance-- for keeping the shoreline clean by responsibly disposing of trash or packing it out. We thank all of the individuals and organizations that have spent time during the pandemic removing trash in heavily-used Lakeside Park. To acknowledge a few: MudLab, Lakeshore Neighbors, Oakland Public Works Adopt-a-Spots, Downtown Street Team, Team Oakland, Youth Empowerment Program (YEP), Rotary Nature Center Friends, St. Paul's School, Park Day School, and Head Royce. Your stewardship is appreciated!

## TRASH TALK – Recycling's NOT the Answer!

Contributed by LMI Clean Lake Volunteer Brett Johnson

There are a number of new initiatives out there to reduce plastic pollution and below are a couple of ideas that Lake Merritt Institute members may want to support. The first is the "Presidential Plastics Action Plan" -- a plan for the "top 8 executive actions that the President can take to address the plastic pollution crisis". One can sign on individually and also as an organization – many organizations have already done so (i.e., The Sierra Club and Audubon). Please visit: [plasticfreepresident.org](http://plasticfreepresident.org) to see the full plan.

Also, there is a plastics initiative coming up in the 2022 California November election and something LMI members may want to get behind. The main idea is to "reduce the use of single-use plastic packaging" and they have gathered enough signatures to make the ballot. This will no doubt be a tough fight as the plastic industry will spend heavily to defeat it.

[https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Plastic\\_Waste\\_Reduction\\_Regulations\\_Initiative\\_\(2022\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Plastic_Waste_Reduction_Regulations_Initiative_(2022))

## VOLUNTEER times Six! - THE CLEAN LAKE PROGRAM IS OPEN!



Local artist Erikalizette decorated our six trash cans with lake-ecosystem-inspired artwork. She did an amazing job! Frankly, no one can miss that these are *our* LMI trash cans and we want more volunteers.

If you would like a chance to use them, contact LMI's Executive Director James Robinson at [lmi@netwiz.net](mailto:lmi@netwiz.net) or call the LMI office at (510) 238-2290 and leave a message. James will arrange for your training in safety protocols by an experienced A-Team volunteer. If you would like to bring a group of volunteers or use the U-Clean-It stations independently, contact James at [lmi@netwiz.net](mailto:lmi@netwiz.net) and leave a message so that he can explain our public health policy for

volunteering and assist you in proper training to participate in the Clean Lake Program.

## Citizen Water Quality Report



Salinity was measured by California Center for Natural History naturalist Damon Tighe (Rotary Nature Center Friends photo).

Water quality was measured at 9 a.m. on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at the Lake Merritt Boating Center dock by The Tidings editor Katie Noonan and volunteers Damon Tighe, Peggy Rehm and Marcille Tibbitts.

Depth 1.9 meters; Water Clarity 1.85 meters (Secchi Depth)  
CLEAR

Temperature: 18 degrees Celsius (degC) at the top (64 deg Fahrenheit)/18.5 degrees Celsius at the bottom (65 deg Fahrenheit) NORMAL

Dissolved Oxygen 4.5 parts per million (ppm) at the top/5 ppm at the bottom. (LOW - Below the EPA minimum standard of 5 ppm)

Salinity 32 parts per thousand (ppt) top/34 ppt bottom (**Saline or salty for this time of year**).

pH: 7 at the top/7 at the bottom NORMAL

## New Old Friends at Lake Merritt - by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon Society

Thirteen happy birders gathered for the still-unofficial April 4th-Wednesday walk at Lake Merritt – not quite so many as in a non-pandemic month, but close.

We got off to a really good start when a Red-tailed Hawk swooped to the top of the dome cage and prowled about, surveying the territory. “How can you tell that’s a redtail?” someone asked, observing its brown-and-beige striped tail. “It’s young yet” was the basic answer. Few descriptive bird names actually apply lifelong and year-round, but redtails do better than most: almost all do get rust-red tails after about a year and keep them the rest of their lives. Besides, they have several field marks – the blocky shape, the cummerbund, the subtle light-colored V speckling the back, the black inside the elbows (invisible on a perching bird) – that help us identify them regardless of age.

Also from the meeting spot, we got a long look at a Green Heron on the island rip-rap. It was standing tall (showing off its truly *herondous* neck) and staring at us as though expecting a fish; no such luck. The water around the islands held an unusual number of scaup for the season, the drakes shining white and black and gray (unlike the dull tones they show on arrival in the fall) and accompanied by more hens than generally venture near the islands. We also saw a lot of Ruddy Ducks, many altogether ruddy instead of dusty brown, but no American Coots (often the most numerous bird on the lake). Coots have never entirely eluded us in April, but they came close this time – only one lone forlorn coot showed up all morning.



The Double-crested Cormorant rookery on the island is down to two nests this year, at least so far – there’s room for more pairs, so it wouldn’t be odd to see newcomers. Two is good, though. They’re entertaining to watch and not numerous enough to need to kill any more trees; the smaller eucalyptus seems to be recovering from the damage done three and four years ago. (If that sounds weird, the answer is simple: these birds prefer sunny nest spots but will build in the shade if that’s all that’s left in their chosen area. Either way, they go about their lives, ejecting former fish – lots of former fish; you do *not* want to stand in their shade – and changing the soil in ways their tree eventually cannot survive. The big tree is a goner, but the little one looks like it may make it.)

*Hank (left). Photo by Lyla Arum*

Hank-the-rescue-pelican had a friend this year, which is notable on two counts. Not only was this the first time she’s ever had company in April, it marks the first twelve-month period (since I started tracking trip reports in 2009) with at least one independent White Pelican showing up for every single walk. Could we have baby pelicans in the offing? Not likely – the visitor might not be one of the birds here last month or the month before, and indeed might not even be male, as I for one can’t tell the difference – but hope is a feature of springtime.

*Hank (left) and her very big friend (right) on the bird island.  
Photo by Lyla Arum*



Thinking of springtime, the Eared Grebes are worth a trip to the lake all on their own. Their alternate plumage – to use the formal term for what most of us refer to as “breeding plumage” for obvious reasons – puts them among the most beautiful birds of North America. We saw several of them along the way, in different stages of the transition from demure gray

to flashing steel and copper and gold. The ruby eyes they always have, but they seem brighter against the metallic background.

Over in Lakeside Park, the warblers were gone, but the usual suspects (House Finches and chickadees and titmice and Bushtits and the rest) were out in force. We couldn't find the Bushtit nest hinted at last month, sad but unsurprising given how close it was to the ground. Highlighting that part of the trip were clouds of Cedar Waxwings fluttering from treetop to treetop, looking like exotic adventurers from another realm. We see them often, and pretty much always in April, but it's still a thrill to meet that black-masked stare.

All told, we observed a record 43 species, well above the mid to high 30s recorded for past Aprils. Some of the increase may be an artifact of my new practice of sharing the preliminary list before completing the report, but I refuse to feel guilty about that. It was – as ever at Lake Merritt – a very fine day indeed, and much too fine for minor qualms.

\*\*\*\*\***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. \*\*\*

## Up-coming events:

**JUNE'S LAKESIDE CHAT #7 –Friday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 7- 8 pm.**  
Free Online Event

Some of us remember the atmospheric river deluges of 2017 when 5 bat rays washed up dead around the shore of Lake Merritt in the course of 2 weeks (see photo, right). Learn about the many challenges facing sharks and rays including **water quality** and **urban runoff**. The bat ray die-off was covered in 2017 issues 1-4 of The Tidings.

Register [HERE](#):

<https://lakesidechat6-strandingeventssharksandrays.eventbrite.com>)



**OAKLANDSIDE LIVE-ISH - Wednesday, June 16, 12 noon to 2pm.** Free Online Event



Part of a 3-day free online event June 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>, “**RACE, SPACE, and LAKE MERRITT,**” will include Councilmember Nikki Fortunato-Bas discussing hotly-contested issues of

space, identity, and belonging around the lake.

LMI's Executive Director James Robinson and lake experts Damon Tighe and Katie Noonan will follow to discuss biodiversity and “re-wilding” at the wildlife refuge. **Wednesday, June 16, 12 noon to 2pm.**

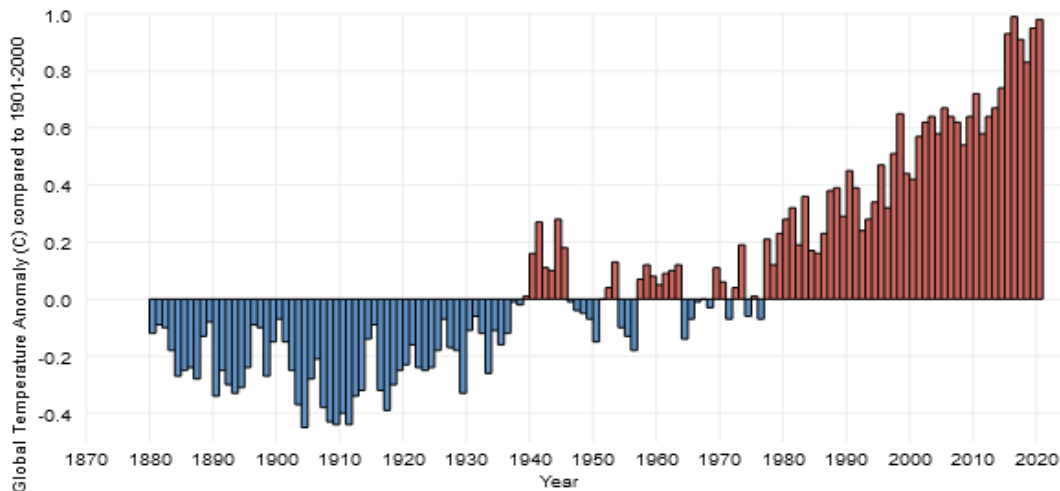
➤ **REGISTER [HERE](https://oaklandside.org/the-oaklandside-live-ish-2021/):** <https://oaklandside.org/the-oaklandside-live-ish-2021/>

# CLIMATE CORNER: CARBON EMISSIONS ARE NOT HEAT

A guest editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

Politicians seem obsessed with reducing carbon emissions these days; 50% by 2030, 100% by 2050, etc. etc. etc. Numbers are thrown out there as goals, and reduced as technology tries to catch up with them. This is all well and good, for we need to drastically reduce carbon pollution as much as possible if our children are to have any chance of a life similar to ours.

But many people misunderstand the relationship between heat and emissions. Reducing carbon emissions is not the same as reducing heat on a warming planet. Consider heat. Since the industrial revolution, greenhouse gases have been building up in the air, and consequently, the average planetary temperature has been rising. According to NOAA's 2020 Annual Climate Report, the combined land and ocean temperature has increased at an average rate of 0.13 degrees Fahrenheit (0.08 degrees Celsius) per decade since 1880. (1) That may not seem like much, but remember, six degrees C is the difference between an ice age and now (which is a vast amount of change).



Achieving a reduction of 100 % in emissions will not magically reduce the temperature in your backyard. It is true that net zero carbon emissions (equal amounts entering the air and being withdrawn via sequestration) will slow the rate of temperature increase, but as long as carbon dioxide and methane levels in the air remain high, the planet will continue to warm. In addition to net zero, we need to reduce the atmospheric carbon level to about 350 ppm (0.035%) from its current level of 417. Only then can our planet begin to cool.

Most of the heat is stored in the oceans, which cover 71 % of the Earth's surface with an average depth of 2.3 miles. Even if we can achieve an atmospheric carbon level of 350, the ocean will continue to give off heat for decades. Given our current and future temperatures, sea level will continue to rise for decades because you can't cool the oceans, and they will continue to melt the ice caps. In addition, storms will continue to be more violent than they were in our ancestor's time, and the impacts of heat on crop production, water supplies, human migration will not relent just because we achieve net zero emissions.

The moral of this message is: "Don't think that just because we will achieve 100 percent reduction in emissions that the climate problem will be solved. If you fall into this trap, then just as the nursery rhyme says:

All the king's horses and all the king's men  
Couldn't put Humpty together again"

will turn into:

All the world's scientists and all the world's leaders  
Won't be able to put the climate back together again.

Indeed, even with zero emissions, it will take decades for greenhouse gas levels to drop, and (due to stored heat in our huge oceans) many more decades before the Earth begins to cool.

This is all the more reason to begin now. And it is all the more reason to take bold actions such as putting a price on carbon emissions in the form of a fee levied on fossil fuel companies, just like we tax tobacco. Such a fee would reduce fossil fuel use by making it more expensive relative to renewable energy. The revenue can be substantial: Starting low but quickly rising to \$100 per ton, it would raise a few billion dollars a year. The fee can be made environmentally just by using that money to reduce income inequality, something we very much need to do now.

Let's do it. How? Tell your congressperson to support [H.R. 2307](#), the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act, now before Congress (2). The planet, and your grandchildren, will thank you.

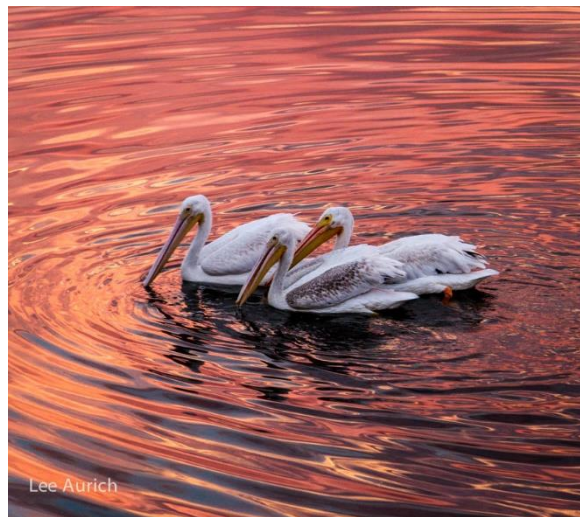
- (1) <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-temperature>
- (2) <https://citizensclimatelobby.org/carbon-pricing-congress/>



### **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 gallons](#) of trash 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. You can download an application at [lakemerrittinstitute.org](http://lakemerrittinstitute.org). A membership application is at the end of this issue.



American White Pelicans; Photo by Lee Aurich

**Please direct questions and comments to The Tidings Editor, Katie Noonan, at [ktnoon@aol.com](mailto:ktnoon@aol.com).**

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