

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

VOLUME XXV

JANUARY 2022

ISSUE I

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

KING TIDES and KING SALMON BRING in the NEW YEAR



Chinook salmon swimming in Storm Drain Outfall 51 on December 19th and oriented upstream into the pipe. Photo by Rudyard Wallen, iNaturalist.

Alaska down to the Ventura River in California. They are *anadromous* fish, meaning that they begin their lives in fresh water streams and later swim out to sea to grow and accumulate fuel for their final migration back to their natal streams. After spawning, they die. Chinook have been seen off and on in Lake Merritt, but none are known to breed in the creeks and storm drains of downtown Oakland. So, it was surprising when live salmon and salmon carcasses began to turn up at the lake in late 2021 after historic atmospheric river storms. Some fish were filled with bright orange eggs. See the pair swimming in Glen Echo Creek here: <https://youtu.be/nB75LcHB-GY>.

Their return is part of a regional happening (<https://baynature.org/2022/01/10/big-rain-leads-to-a-big-year-for-salmon/>). They appear to be following ancient instincts to swim upstream toward fresh water, attracted by the fresh water pulses flowing into the Bay after a long period of drought. Their deaths are not owing to pollution, but rather to natural senescence and life cycle end. Climate change and human development stand in the way of their re-establishment for now but their appearance in our lake is a sign of hope. Learn more at Lakeside Chat #16 with Dr. Brian Allee on March 4th.

<https://oaklandside.org/2021/12/16/salmon-in-lake-merritt-more-rainfall-is-causing-some-fish-to-wander-into-oaklands-lagoon/>

<https://baynature.org/2022/01/10/big-rain-leads-to-a-big-year-for-salmon/>

LMI in December: 5550 gallons of trash removed from the lake by staff and volunteers in December.

Total trash collected in 2021 was **66,830 gallons**.

47 used hypodermic syringes were removed.

LMI Director James Robinson hosted **117 volunteers**, gave 2 presentations and attended 3 meetings.

8.44 inches of rain recorded recorded by LMI rain gauge

THANK YOU TO OUR NOVEMBER and DECEMBER VOLUNTEERS! We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job! Volunteer groups: Achieve, Park Day School, Yoga Group and the LMI A-TEAM regulars. YOU can support the Lake Merritt Institute's important work. Go to our [website](#) to find out how. More photos in this email edition of The Tidings.

LOVE YOUR LAKE!



Trash Talk –by Dorothy Kimmel of LMI's A-Team

As we close the door on 2021 and look to 2022, we have a lot to be proud of, including the wonderful success of our Farmers Market Membership table. We set up the table weekly in the fall and then moved to monthly in November and December. I think it was a satisfying opportunity for all of us to share what we love about the Lake. While our initial goal was to recruit new members and volunteers, we quickly realized that the community around the Lake is interested and appreciative of what LMI does to maintain the health of our unique natural environment, so we found ourselves educating families and children about LMI in ways we had not expected. Each week was wonderful, each week we shared our stories to inspire others. We made cleaning trash look fascinating.



Congratulations to everyone for a job well done! Here is a list of those who generously gave their time and energy over the past several months: Kathy Brandenburg, Christine Brigagliano, Susan Campodonico, Laura Goderez, Dorothy Kimmel, Diane Levy, Naomi Means, Myra Redman, Tim Revak, Kevin Shomo, and Miriam Valesco. Of course none this could have happened without the wholehearted support of our Board of Directors, and our fearless Executive Director James Robinson, and the tireless efforts and good spirits of Alfredo Sanchez. Our efforts netted (so to speak) 27 new volunteers and as well as new members to our roster. The membership committee will meet in January to consider how to move forward from here.

With gratitude to all from Dorothy, Susan and Christine, A-Team Members

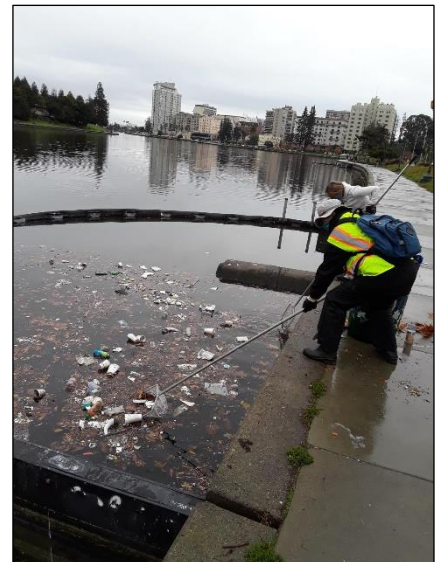
INTERVENTION

We scoured the lake's beaches for trash with our nets when a lifeless brown racoon with delicate fingers and toes washed ashore, a sleek black cormorant floats listlessly with its head under water, an elegant white egret lies desiccated sprawled in the marsh grass, and the remains of urban rats are all too often found along the lake's shoreline.

Did the Ohlone see these corpses in the early settlement days or have we caused these deaths with our trash and microplastics? Is this nature's way of saying "times up"? For eons the cycle of life and death in this old slough has been shifting. And now the shifting climate will be the ultimate judge whether the clock has run out.

When do we intervene? If not now, when.

Contributed by Miriam Valesco, Lake Merritt A-Team Volunteer.



Miriam Valesco and Naomi Means remove trash from storm drain outfall.

Birders in Aspic at Lake Merritt – by Hilary Powers – Golden Gate Audubon

“Will you cancel?” “Is the field trip a go regardless of the rain?” “What would be the latest time to make the call?” The day before the Golden Gate Audubon 4th-Wednesday walk for December, the messages came rolling in. The answer was much the same every time – basically, the trip is always a go, but if the weather is truly nasty, it doesn’t go far. Someone will be there at 9:30 regardless, but if it’s raining sideways, a quick look for migrants and regulars is all we’ll get.



Northern Shoveler, male at left - Wikipedia

Northern Shoveler (a vanishingly rare visitor here), looking like a Mallard drake dressed up for a formal ball.

The shoveler wasn’t the only rare-for-here sighting, either. A female Hooded Merganser swam near enough to recognize without binoculars, her beautiful dark-blond crest swept back in the absence of a drake to display for. Rarer still – we’ve seen hoodies here on four other occasions, one just this year – we spotted a Northern Mockingbird perching atop one of the trees on the near island, and we’ve never ever seen one of those here before. Which is weird; the lake and its park have lots of places that look mockingbird-attractive

At Right: Female Hooded Merganser - photo by Steven Summers Nov 2018 at the Rotary Nature Center



to a human eye, but there wasn’t even a space for the bird on the history table, which included rows for everything that seemed likely to show up when it was put together based on local experience back in 2009. We didn’t spot the December bluebirds hoped for last month, so that cell is still empty, but we did get the almost-rare Short-billed (was Mew) Gull, and we got good looks at the bright golden face of a Hermit Warbler, a species seen once on a Christmas Bird Count but never before on a 4th-Wednesday walk.

The Belted Kingfisher was back on the islands, clattering softly from tree to tree, keeping an eye out for fish while consistently facing away from the group. Almost certainly a female – we never saw the orange belt, but it did have orange feathering along the flanks and this year’s juveniles should have molted into adult plumage by now. Meanwhile, across the path in one of the bare trees between Bellevue and the lake, a Nuttall’s Woodpecker (recognizable by the ladder back and definitely female per the pure black and white head) worked among the branches close enough to the ground to allow really good, non-neck-straining looks at an often elusive bird.

In the garden, a veritable swarm of tiny gray birds, long tails making them look like flying mice, dropped into a large bush only to pour out of it and across the path. “How many Bushtits was *that???*” a newish birder asked in awe. “*Seventeen!*” chorused half a dozen voices, and everyone burst out laughing. Then we explained that 17 was the number generally agreed-upon for too-many-Bushtits-to-count, which is how they often appear outside the breeding season. They’re so small, and they move so fast, and their only distinguishing feature is the light and dark eyes that separate the girls from the boys.... It started out as a number to use when you didn’t want to look like you were just guessing, the way a round 20 would, but the jest is now so widespread that if I did somehow get to 17 on a real count, I’d be tempted to put in 16 or 18 instead.

So we had a good good day, all the better for being half dreaded, and not even all that uncomfortable for those dressed for it. Everyone looked happy enough, anyway; I should have taken a quick survey to see what that meant – possibly not the five layers of leg coverings and six of shirts, sweaters, and jackets I’d have contributed – but it was clear that Lake Merritt had delivered yet again on its perpetual promise....

*** **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.

Community Water Quality Report – Atmospheric rains and King Tides



Katie tests water quality after rains.
Photo by Rotary Nature Center Friends

Water quality was measured December 27th at the Lake Merritt Boating Center dock by The Tidings editor Katie Noonan at 11:45 a.m.

Depth 1.55 meters; Water Clarity 95 centimeters (Secchi Depth) slightly turbid

Temperature: 8 degrees Celsius (degC) at the top (46 deg Fahrenheit)/10.5 degrees Celsius at the bottom (51 deg Fahrenheit) NORMAL

Salinity 9 parts per thousand (ppt) top/25 ppt bottom)

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

Dissolved Oxygen 5 parts per million (ppm) at the top/2 ppm at the bottom. (Bottom water is hypoxic and does not meet EPA standards). See photo at right.

STRATIFIED: The water has layers of different temperature, salinity and dissolved oxygen.

Tide Gate Status - Gates were open at 3 pm on Mon 12/27 and Adrian Cotter noted the tide had just changed (from ebb to flow into the lake). Great to see.



TIME TO MAKE A CHARITABLE DONATION TO THE LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

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 that 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. You can pick up a membership application at our Farmer’s Market table, or download it at lakemerrittinstitute.org.



Do you want to help the community and get regular exercise? -- CLEAN THE LAKE! Contact LMI’s Executive Director James Robinson at 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 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.

THE CLIMATE CORNER: – 2022 WILL BE A BETTER YEAR

– A guest editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

As the new year dawns, let us pledge to work for a better world that will include the following headlines.

January: Build Back Better legislation passed congress, Oakland created 6,000 new entirely low-income dwelling units, and local businesses that raised the minimum wage to \$20 per hour thrived. Increased job opportunities and compassionate police work led to a drop in crime, especially in Lakeside Park, where park ranger staff are assigned.

February: A national fee on carbon pollution was assessed on fossil fuel companies. One hundred percent of the revenue is being returned in monthly checks to those in the lower 2/3 of income brackets. Families of four began receiving monthly checks of \$250. The stock market surged in response. As such policies become worldwide due to a border adjustment, carbon pollution levels will begin to drop.

March: Covid levels declined to those lower than seasonal flu (except for the unvaccinated). The latest variant was dubbed to be pi, and a Berkeley graduate student genius was reported to have finally calculated an end number for pi.

April: Rainfall totals exceeded normal, and Bay Area reservoirs overflowed. Salmon are leaping and were found in Glen Echo creek. A shadowy group called Salmon Seekers took credit for creating a gravel shoal in the creek. Authorities threatened penalties for illegal placement of fill, but said they would not have enough manpower to pursue charges until 2026.

May: Levels of plastic litter in Lake Merritt dropped to record lows. Evaluators credited Institute efforts in litter abatement education, storm drain awareness, volunteer campaigns, and city enforcement's new slogan "Litter at Your Own Risk."

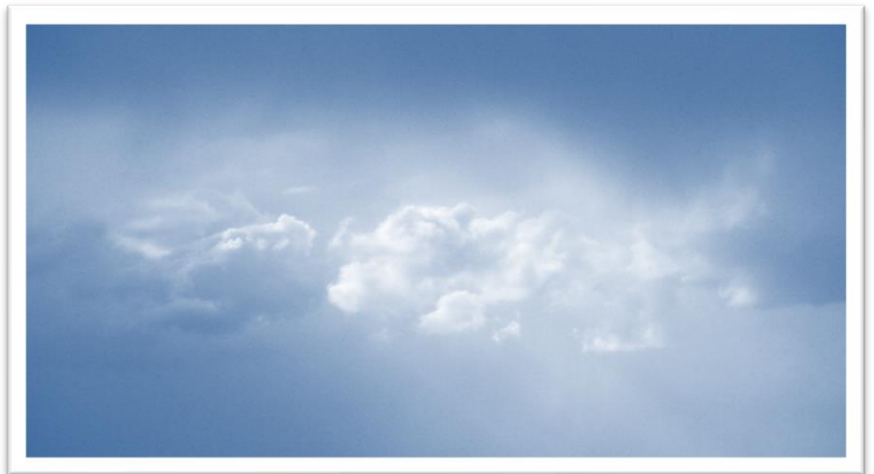
June: Purchases of heat pumps, electric vehicles, home batteries and solar panels surged. Elon Musk agreed to support unionization. National no-till farming expanded, and endangered coastal communities began to invest in inland locations.

July: La Nina fizzled and weather patterns trended toward normal, least terns nested at LM, new wetlands along the channel grew like crazy, and the Rotary Nature Center building opened again, staffed by volunteers from Rotary Nature Center Friends.

August: The CA Public Utilities Commission apologized for its previous attempt to charge a fee to owners of solar panels, then resigned. PG&E requested to be taken over by a publicly owned nonprofit.

September: The City of Oakland installed 50 storm drain filters in the downtown watershed, and Alameda County created remote control of channel tide gates, leading EPA to grant a one-year extension of the deadline to reach zero trash levels in Lake Merritt storm drains before assessing powerful penalties.

October: With the help of early seasonal rainfall, fire crews limited the fire season to record low burns. Lee Aurich photographed a triple rainbow over Lake Merritt, and Hank the pelican was featured in a Pixar movie based on James Robinson's book.



November: A senator from WV was defeated in a recall election, a senator from KY passed away in his sleep while muttering incomprehensible gibberish, and hackers continually blocked a former president's computer for 365 days. Candidates pledging to be bipartisan won overwhelmingly.

December: A new virus began spreading across the planet. It is reported to increase human compassion, intelligence, and cheerfulness.

Let's go for it.



The Salmon of Knowledge - In March, 1996, Greenpeace, Ireland undertook its maiden voyage, a celebration of Ireland's great River Shannon. Luka Bloom was invited to join the voyage from the mouth to the source, as a crew member and on-board bard. The boat was christened "

An Bradán Feasa

meaning the salmon of knowledge. "Listen to the River" was inspired by this great experience. We begin with a fisherman....

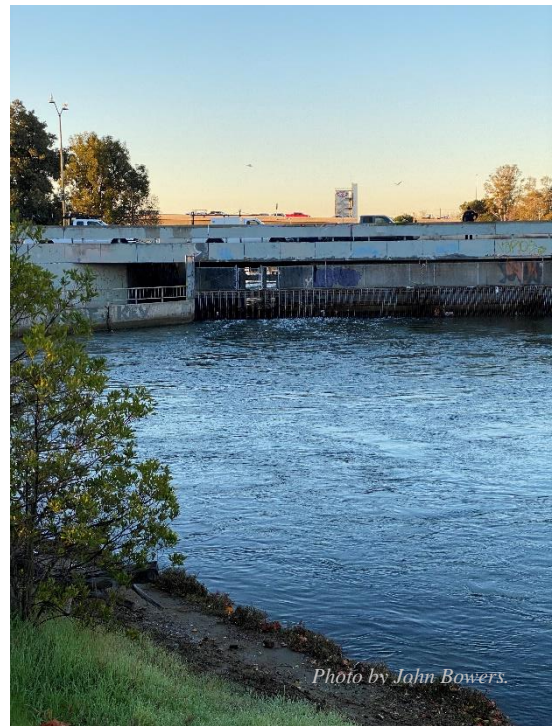
He looks down on the lake on a sunlit morning
Loves the ancient world that is within
The surface shadow is his simple warning
Transformation must begin

Close your eyes, listen to the river
Open your heart, listen to the river
Close your eyes, listen to the river

The rain pours down on Barley Harbour
As expectation fills the pier
The fisherman looks out on the horizon
The salmon of knowledge is coming here

Let the bells ring out in the heartland
Let the poets come to pen
May they write in praise of celebration
The salmon goes upstream once again

Close your eyes.....



This beautiful song was recorded on the Windham Hill Collection entitled Celtic Christmas II in 1996 with guitar, bodhran, euphonium, bass, and backing vocals. Our channel may not be the Shannon, but it still breathes life into salmon carrying on an ancient journey.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9y6dWVdBJU> Selection starts at 1 min.

Contributed by Dr. Richard Bailey, LMI Founder and current Board Member.

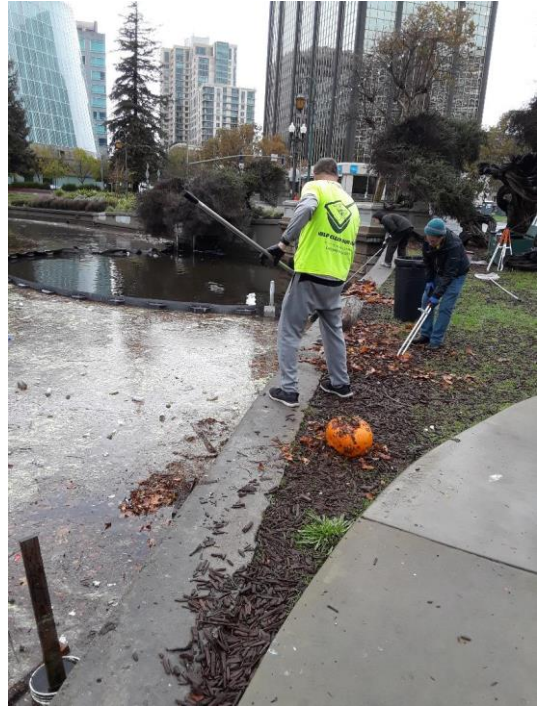
Please direct questions and comments to The Tidings Editor, Katie Noonan, at ktnoon@aol.com.

"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 94-3214160

OUR LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE STAFF, VOLUNTEERS & PARTNERS IN ACTION!



ALFREDO AT THE CHANNEL



A-TEAM VOLUNTEERS



VOLUNTEER GROUPS: PARK DAY SCHOOL AND ACHIEVE



PULLED FROM THE LAKE AFTER ATMOSPHERIC RIVER “BIG FLUSH”

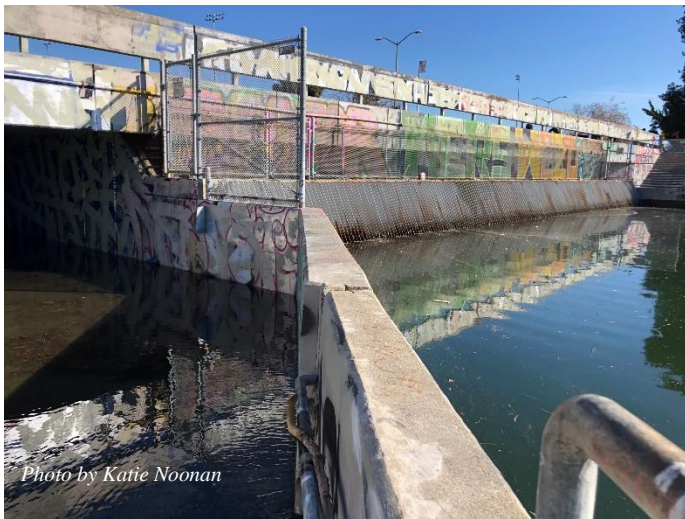


Photo by Katie Noonan



Photo by Robert Raburn

KING TIDE JANUARY 2nd at 7TH STREET FLOOD CONTROL STATION AND AT ESTUARY PARK



Golden Gate Audubon Christmas Bird Count December 19th



Adrian Cotter documented
open tide gate
on December 27th

Tidal Flow Brings Vital

- water
- nutrients
- oxygen and
- organisms

by *mixing* for a natural environment in the entire Wildlife Refuge.