



THE TIDINGS

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Adopt One Small Thing as Your New Year’s Resolution

By Kathleen Nay

The New Year arrives with a lot of feelings. You might feel relief. (Made it through another year; glad to put it behind me!) Or exhaustion. (Thank goodness the holidays are over.) Maybe you feel the “Sunday Scaries” time-off equivalent, which I like to call the “Holiday Hangover.” (Do I really have to go back to work already?) Hopefully, you feel refreshed — the scent of possibility lingers about you! — and ambitious. (What will I achieve this year? 2026 will be My Year!)

Some people love, and others hate, making New Year’s resolutions. I don’t make one every year, but when I do, I prefer to make them fun and challenging in unexpected ways. No “get swole” for me. Nope. One year I committed to wearing more dresses, simply because I wanted to. Another, I told myself I would play more boardgames with my neighbors. This year, I hope to spend less time on my phone by carving out more time for analog creativity: I really enjoy film photography, and my darkroom skills are rusty!

For the full article of *The Tidings* in color, visit <https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/tidings>

What if, instead of focusing only on ourselves for New Year’s resolutions, we committed to doing One Small Thing in our own shared community? Below is a menu of options, small habits really, that you can adopt in 2026 to protect Lake Merritt. They’re not lifestyle overhauls, but instead are tiny, repeatable habits that can add up to a lot over the course of a year.

1. **The “Every Walk” Rule.** Commit to picking up just one piece of trash every time you visit the Lake.
2. **Pocket Gloves.** Keep gloves or a trash picker in your car or bag, so that when you find yourself by the lake, trash pickup becomes easy and automatic.
3. **Default to Refill.** Make refillable bottles and mugs your default, and track the plastics you don’t bring to the lake.
4. **Storm Day Adventures.** Check storm drains after heavy rainstorms, and (if safe) clear visible debris before it has a chance to drain into Lake Merritt.
5. **Monthly Date With The Lake.** Put one cleanup or nature walk on your calendar every month. Treat it like an appointment. Bonus points if you bring a date with you!
6. **Learn One Species.** Choose a single bird, fish, or plant to recognize by sight by the end of the year.
7. **Share Your Habit.** Bring one new person to the lake this year and model care through action and stewardship.

New Year’s Resolutions don’t have to be punishing. They can be small, creative, and even enjoyable. And they absolutely do not have to be about self-improvement — because nothing is wrong with you anyway!

As for me, I feel reflective at the end of every year. I like to think back on the ways I’ve grown, the wins I’ve attained, and the joys I’ve collected along the way. It’s totally okay if our growth, wins, and joys are more about making progress than achieving purity. When it comes to keeping Lake Merritt clean and sparkling, imperfect consistency beats pristine perfection.

At this time next year, what will you be reflecting on? What’s one small, repeatable thing you might do in 2026 to make an impact in your Lake Merritt, Oakland community?



*Oakland students leading by example. Thank you for consistently showing up during this rainy season for **Saturday LMI cleanups** and helping protect Lake Merritt.*

The Ones That Got Away at Merritt

by Hilary Powers, Golden Gate Bird Alliance Volunteer

The usual pre-Holiday crowd – about 25 people – gathered for the Fall Golden Gate Bird Alliance walk at Lake Merritt, full of hope and anticipation for flocks of seasonal arrivals. The weather was lovely and bright, just on the cold side of cool, and the news was very very good: two local rarities (Ring-necked Ducks and a Green-winged Teal) and one real rarity (a female Tufted Duck from the far side of the world) had been observed by several visitors to the lake the day before. I'd seen the teal myself, my first here in 30-odd years of visits, and believed absolutely in the others.



Glaucous-winged Gull, Photo by Katharine W. Cook, 11/26/25

Well, a first-of-season Glaucous-winged Gull did swim along the crumbling lake edge in front of the geodesic dome, showing off its pale gray wingtips, and a Forster's Tern perched on one of the floats. That was the first November Forster's sighting on my trip record; most years they disappear from late fall to early spring, even though some stay in the Bay Area all winter. We also saw lots of Western Bluebirds, including one fine blue-and-rose male on a lamp post beside our meeting spot.

A Ruby-crowned Kinglet flutter-hopped through the branches of one of the oaks along Bellevue, and a Cooper's Hawk eyed us from the top of another. A female Downy Woodpecker also made her elegant black-and-white way through the grove.

Looking out on the water, we saw most of the winter regulars – rafts of Lesser Scaup and a few Greater; lots of Bufflehead and Ruddy Ducks, along with a crowd of Pied-billed Grebes, a few Eared and Horned Grebes, and one lone lorn Western Grebe, our first since last May. The lake also held a couple of pairs of Common Goldeneyes (the males with their distinctive full-moon cheek patches) but no crescent-moon-marked Barrow's Goldeneyes, enthusiastically as we searched for them.

Heading for the garden, we paused outside the Lawn Bowling clubhouse to enjoy our special privileged access to its flush toilets, courtesy of one of the trip leaders. (If you know a city councilor, consider pointing out the lack-of-restroom situation at the lake; the Sail Boat House has the only flush toilets open to the public this year.) Birders waiting outside the building enjoyed a real air show: two Red-tailed Hawks and a Red-shouldered Hawk swooping and diving above the trees for several minutes – not making contact with one another, so the activity looked to a human eye like pure play. I wished I could join in!

The catalpa trees on either side of the path across from the Garden Center were still largely covered with leaves. We searched earnestly for sapsuckers – that being the place where they're most likely to appear and November the month we most often see them there – but no luck. As always, row after horizontal row of tiny holes in the bark proved that they often make use of those trees, so it's always interesting to stop there regardless of results.

The park and garden supplied most of the winter regulars – the chickadees and titmice and crowned sparrows and so on – failing only the Bushtits and Lesser Goldfinches. In the end, we wound up counting 53 species of birds (including the young Ross’s Goose, mottled white and gray, photographed by one birder after the rest of the group left the Embarcadero area). That’s a huge total – well beyond the mid-high 40s reported in recent years – and satisfying all on its own. No Tufted Duck (despite many attempts to hang the name on young male scaup), no Green-winged Teal, no Ring-necked Ducks, though I saw several of the latter the next day on a Thanksgiving stroll, along with (just to add to the fun) a whole flock of Northern

Shovelers (which I’ve seen here on only five occasions, most recently in January 2022).

Miss some, catch some, enjoy the successes and in a weird fashion even the frustrations: a day like every other at Lake Merritt, a very good day indeed.

BIRD WALKS AT THE LAKE: Join Hilary Powers any fourth Wednesday of the month for a bird walk at the lake. Muster at the rock-strewn point of shore beside the Boat House parking lot at 9:30 a.m. for what are always fascinating introductions to local bird life. This trip happens rain or shine. It is free but Golden Gate Bird Alliance asks for advance registration on their website.

Register at goldengatebirdalliance.org for the next monthly bird walk:

2025 Impact Wrap-Up: Every Bag Counts

In 2025, Lake Merritt Institute crew and volunteers removed **111,630 gallons of pollution** from the lake and surrounding shorelines five days a week, year-round. This impact was made possible by the dedication of **1,862** of volunteers who contributed **5,706 volunteer hours** to protect Oakland’s Crown Jewel.

Much of this pollution enters the lake through the 62+ storm drains from the surrounding watershed. Our consistent, on-the-ground presence allows us to respond quickly and prevent long-term harm to wildlife, water quality, and public access.

Beyond cleanups, we engaged community members and youth in hands-on environmental stewardship, turning action into learning and learning into lasting care for the lake.

Thanks to our generous supporters, we raised **\$27,324 of our \$30,000** goal to help sustain our current cleanup and stewardship work! All of this was made possible thanks to our neighbors, organizations, students, and businesses who really stepped in to help us reach our goal.



Lesser Scaup, Photo by Katharine W. Cook, November 26, 2025



As we look ahead to 2026, the need for consistent lake stewardship remains urgent. Thank you for being part of this work. Every bag counts—and together, it all adds up.

THANK YOU TO OUR WINTER SPONSORS!



Are you a local business or organization interested in partnering with us to support Oakland's Crown Jewel? Ask us about sponsorship opportunities in 2026 at info@lakemerrittinstitute.org

For questions and comments please email us at info@lakemerrittinstitute.org.

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