



THE TIDINGS

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Winter Issue

“The Tidings” is a publication of the Lake Merritt Institute, and is neither funded by, nor does it represent the opinions of the City of Oakland.

Dear Lake Merritt: A Community Love Letter

By Kathleen Nay

If you’ve spent enough time at the lake, you know it well. Lake Merritt has distinct rhythms: cool, gloomy mornings that, by midday, blossom into generous sun. High tide, then low tide. New birds fly in with the changing seasons. Occasionally, larger visitors arrive: bat rays, salmon, and leopard sharks have all been reported over the years.

Weekday walkers, and weekend market crowds. Daytime drum circles, sunset dancers, and yes, even moonlit fire spinners. It’s almost as if the lake is a self-possessed entity, with its own moods, music, and magic. These rhythmic observations make me think about how we form relationships with places, not all at once but through repetition: the daily walk, the loop around the water, the bench you always choose, and the purpose that brings you there.

In honor of Valentine’s Day, I invited friends and strangers to share what they love most about Lake Merritt. I gave little direction: “**If you could write a one-line love letter to Lake Merritt, what would you say?**” The responses were pure poetry.

A vibrant urban oasis where community thrives in joy, laughter and love — keep it beautiful — create good memories! (Ravi)

You make me remember my time spent in Berkeley — joyful walks with friends through your lush plants and those glittering night walks were truly mesmerizing and unforgettable! (Mehak)

My dearest Lake Merritt, my love for you is as infinite as the path that circles your body. (Katey)

You are my calm in rocky times. (Sabrina)

Lake Merritt is my favorite spot, the best of Oakland — energy, community, great vibes, and unbelievable beauty. (Craig)

Lake Merritt. You are beautiful, flawed, and always changing. Like all of us. (Magpie)

How do I love thee, let me count the waves. (Anonymous)

I deliver my letters to You and I never get a response. (Anonymous)

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



I love you Lake Merritt, you are a shining reflection of all us — we see the beauty, and the trash, that ends up in you. (Anonymous)

My dearest Lake Merritt, you are so much more than a beautiful refuge for the birds, animals, plants, and people of this town — you are the living heart and soul of Oakland. (Ana-Marie)

A mosaic of experiences and a range of voices emerge. Where some people express longing, others find belonging. There are fond memories; reflections on beauty; familiarity, routine, and comfort. Excitement, too!

These letters are expressions of care, gratitude, and dependence. Love is not only romantic; it is also noticing, tending, and protecting that which we love. This month, I invite you to see Lake Merritt as not just a backdrop, but a relationship. Love is in how we show up to care for the lake, and all of the places that sustain us. What does loving Lake Merritt mean to you?



*Photo 5/16/25 –
Joaquin Miller
Elementary students on a
Watershed Field Trip
with Lake Merritt
Institute, participating in
a shoreline cleanup and
water quality testing to
learn about and protect
our watershed.*

Winter Highlights from LMI

By Thoey Bou

Last call, educators! Schedule your Spring school field trips with Lake Merritt Institute before the school year wraps up, it'll be here before we know it.

We're currently booked through April for our **Watershed Field Trips** and are excited to keep the momentum going. Thank you to our supporters who have made it possible for us to maintain this schedule. Because of you, we're able to continue offering these hands-on environmental learning experiences through the end of the school year. We encourage classrooms to secure their dates while limited space is still available.

We believe youth are our future, and we're proud to help foster the next generation of Lake Merritt stewards. We've been busy behind the scenes and look forward to sharing more soon.

Schedule your Watershed Field Trip here:

<https://calendly.com/lakemerrittinstitute-info/watershed-classroom-field-trip>

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Here at Lake Merritt Institute, we receive a high volume of inquiries and reports that fall outside of our scope. As a reminder, we are the only organization actively removing pollution from the waters of Lake Merritt.

For concerns outside of in-water pollution removal, we encourage the community to **report to OAK 311**. Submitting accurate reports helps document issues and strengthens our **collective advocacy** for a healthier, more sustainable Lake Merritt. Neighborhood and community involvement truly makes a difference!

“Really appreciate your work. Local community action is crucial these days.” - Supporter

A special thank you to the **Rose Grant Foundation** for supporting our work. Their funding allowed us to purchase a reliable truck and new heavy-duty nets, critical equipment to help us remove pollution of every size and volume from Lake Merritt all year long.

Thank you for a strong start to 2026 at Lake Merritt Institute. We’re grateful to continue this work alongside you.

Unexpected Blessings at Lake Merritt

by Hilary Powers, Golden Gate Bird Alliance Volunteer (December 24th Bird Walk)

Only eight birders (including three from Germany) joined us for the December fourth-Wednesday walk at the lake, enjoying mild, dry, partly sunny weather instead of the rain and howling winds that had seemed likely up to the last moment. That prediction (plus the fact that the day was Christmas Eve) doubtless reduced the company, but the small group proved to be an extra treat for those who ventured out: everyone could see everything, and when we got to the garden, hungry chickadees blessed every hand that offered black oil sunflower seed – several chickadees, no waiting.

Writing that, I suddenly wondered what They use to make sunflower seed into “black oil” sunflower seed. What kind of oil? Izzit safe? (My supply was a gift, and I never really thought about it, not having a place at home for a feeder.) Anyway, it turns out there’s no making involved; black oil sunflower seeds form in black oil sunflowers on black oil sunflower plants just like the regular striped ones do on their own plants. Birds prefer them because they’re easier to open and richer in protein and fat – the “oil” part of the name is no joke; they’re also the source of most of the sunflower oil on the market – but you probably won’t see them in a party snack bowl, as the individual seeds are smaller than the striped ones and make more work for human hands and teeth.



Two American White Pelicans and a young Double-crested Cormorant on a float, photo by Katharine W. Cook, December 24, 2025

Groups of American White Pelicans cruised in tight fishing parties and perched on the floats and islands, but we couldn’t find Hank-the-rescue-pelican among them. Before our worry could build too far, however, we spotted a volunteer feeding her at the edge of the lake past the playground and laughed with relief. Why would we worry? I try to stick to happy news in these reports, so I haven’t mentioned that pelican-sized heap of white feathers on Pelican Island, which made our continuing failure-to-find especially unnerving. Sad fact of human nature: loss of a known and long-cared-for pelican would feel like a tragedy, while loss of a random visitor pelican seems only a regrettable glimpse of reality.

As we approached the Rotary Nature Center, two young men rushed up to us to announce with delight that cormorants were building nests in the tree at the corner of the playground. “They’re great,” sez I, “But they have to be last season’s nests.” “Nooo – we’ve never seen them before – why not??” “That tree was full of leaves up till this

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month, hiding the nests.” “So they’ll be back?” “Yes, probably around the end of February. That’s an awful place for them, though....” and so on, through the drawbacks of having a manure-generator of such strength in such a high-traffic area.

Ah well – nesting cormorants are fun to watch and listen to, and I’ve never heard of actual harm to man or beast. Half a cup or so of white goo isn’t really a disaster....



*Scaups, photo by Katharine W. Cook,
December 24, 2025*

The lake surface held most of the regulars and expected-occasionals, most notably a fine golden-beaked Clark’s Grebe. Both scaup species were out in force, as were the Buffleheads and Ruddy Ducks. There were several pairs of Common Goldeneyes, the drakes showing round moon shapes on their black cheeks, but none of the rarer crescent-moon-marked Barrow’s Goldeneyes and no Canvasbacks, which shouldn’t be rare at all. In fact, this was the first December miss on Canvasbacks since I started keeping records back in 2009. No idea why – they were here in November and I always thought they came to stay for the winter.

Looking over my shoulder to check on the group, I found I’d drifted a block ahead – all eight and my co-leader Kat had stopped to focus on the condo tower at the corner of Perkins and Bellevue. I rejoined them, puzzled, as the top of the building (where peregrines occasionally perch) seemed quite empty of birds. And so it was, but someone with very sharp eyes had noticed a slight bump about halfway down, where an adult Red-tailed Hawk clutched a corner balcony. Red-tails are *big* birds, but this one almost disappeared against that huge gray mass.

The trees along Bellevue offered both our local nuthatches – the first time we’ve seen them in the same month. Which isn’t too surprising, as although the Red-breasted Nuthatch has appeared off and on over the years in almost any month, this was the White-breasted Nuthatch’s first December – of five appearances ever, four of them this year: a real break in the pattern.

Elsewhere among the Bellevue trees and the ones in the park and garden, we had almost all the winter regulars, missing only the Golden-crowned Sparrow. To compensate, we saw a single Cedar Waxwing perching high in the branches. (Usually when we spot one waxwing, a dozen others crowd the view – but this guy was all alone.) We also spotted a House Sparrow for the first December in more than a decade. All told, we logged 47 species of birds, down from last year’s 51 but not by too much – attributable perhaps to the smaller number of eyes in the birding group – and in any case we had no complaints about the day, which all by itself and in comparison to expectations was a very good day indeed.

EVENTS AT LAKE MERRITT



Protect Our Lake

Join **Lake Merritt Institute Cleanup** every **Tuesday** and **Saturday** at **10am** to give back to Oakland's Crown Jewel we all cherish.

Every Tuesday and Saturday 10am
Sail Boat House 568 Bellevue Ave

Together, we remove pollution from the water and shorelines to keep Lake Merritt clean and thriving for wildlife and our community.

All supplies and instructions provided, register today!

REGISTER: www.lakemerrittinstitute.org

TFTMoT

Trash Falcons Trash Museum of Trash
on display at the

Junior Center of Art & Science
558 Bellevue Ave, Oakland, CA
February 9 - March 6, 2026

Join us at the opening & closing parties where the **TFTMoT Gift Shop** will also be open!
Friday February 13, 6:30-8:30pm
Friday March 6, 6:00-8:00pm

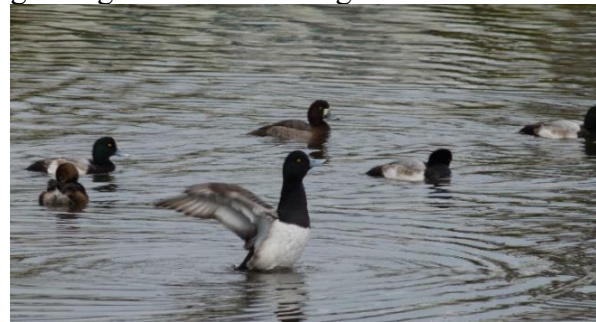
Works of art created by Trash Falcons artists will also be on display in the adjacent gallery.

www.trashfalcons.org/museum



BIRD WALKS AT THE LAKE:

Join Hilary Powers any fourth Wednesday of the month for a bird walk at the lake. Register at goldengatebirdalliance.org



THANK YOU TO OUR SAVE THE LAKE SPONSORS!



Oakland Women's Rowing Club

Founded in 1916, the Oakland Women's Rowing Club's mission is to foster the love of the outdoors, to promote team spirit, and to promote the art of rowing among the women of Oakland and the Greater Bay Area
www.owrcrowers.org



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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