

THE TIDINGS



LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

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



WELCOME TO 2017 ! IT IS GOING TO BE A BEAUTIFUL YEAR WITH MUCH GOOD NEWS - In spite of a rather tumultuous presidential election and results, and many demonstrations following, this year promises to be one of Lake Merritt’s, and LMI’s, best. The water quality of the lake is in better shape than it has been in decades. Critical Measure DD work at the 10th Street connector is nearing completion (maintenance divers give grinning reports of an almost aquarium-like environment of clear water filled with marine life). Additional Measure DD water quality improvements, including more vortex trash filters and rain gardens, are expected to be constructed in the next few years.

(Photo: James Robinson, Executive Director, LMI; Aerial photo survey of Lake Merritt and 10th Street Channel; December 30, 2016)

LAKE MERRIT INSTITUTE SEEKS RENEWAL OF CONTRACT FOR TWO YEARS – LMI is a non-profit institute that completes a broad range of protective tasks around the lake with funds coming from memberships and special donations, and a contract with the City. It is the contract from the Public Works Department that provides the core of funding needed to purchase tools and equipment, purchase and operate aeration pumps, coordinate volunteer groups for lake cleaning, give natural science presentations to local school groups, etc. Important work! The value of the City contract is approximately \$175,000 per year. Thus LMI is looking forward to being able to provide two more years of fine **LOVE YOUR LAKE** service. Thank you, LMI!

JAMES ROBINSON PROMOTED TO LMI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – In an early January meeting of the LMI Board of Directors, the directors voted to promote then existing Co-Executive Director James Robinson to the full-time position of Executive Director. Congratulations, James!

MEASURE DD WORK AT THE 10th STREET CONNECTOR AND 7th STREET FLOOD CONTROL PUMPING STATION NEARING COMPLETION –



(Photos: Joel Peter; Oakland Public Works, Retired; January 2016; Project underway and near completion)

The last few months of Measure DD heavy earthwork at the 10th Street connector channel and 7th Street flood control pumping station are finally coming to successful completion. The project offers hikers, bicyclist, kayakers, scullers and boaters, full connection from Lake Merritt to the Oakland Estuary. However, the best news is in regard to even further water quality improvements for Lake Merritt that the prospect of significantly improved dissolved oxygen levels will provide. The Clean Water Act requires brackish water lakes like LM to have dissolved oxygen levels of at least 5 parts per million (ppm). Levels of 5 ppm are considered minimum to support marine life (and avoid marine life die-offs). The surface waters of Lake Merritt typically have oxygen levels over 5 ppm, but levels sometimes fall to 3, 2 and even 0 ppm in deeper parts of the lake. Not good. The soon to be improved tidal flows from the Oakland Estuary into the lake are expected to elevate oxygen levels significantly mostly in deeper waters.

CLIMATE CORNER – A BRIDGE OF THE BEAMS OF THE SUN – A Guest Editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey (LMI Founder) - Every year at Christmas I dig out my ancient Kingston Trio album entitled “The Last Month of the Year” and play “Mary Mild”, also known as “The Bitter Withy” which, according to the album cover:

“is founded on an Oriental legend known in Europe before the end of the eleventh century. The story, not found in official church writings, tells of Jesus at the age of eleven being chastised by Mary for building a bridge of sunbeams to illustrate his divine power to neighborhood children who refuse to play with a child so humble born. The “bridge of sunbeams” miracle has been traced from Egypt to Ireland, and to the lives of medieval saints.”

The words to the song, as sung by the Kingston Trio (it has also been recorded by many others) include:

“As it fell out on a cold winter’s day, the drops of rain did fall.
Our savior asked leave of his mother Mary, if he might go and play at ball.
Go up the hill, his mother said, and there you will find three jolly children.
But let me hear no complaints from you, when you come home again.

(Continued)



But the children said we are royal sons, and we will not play at ball,
 For you are but a poor maid's child, born in an oxen stall.
 If you are lords and lady's sons, and you will not play at ball,
 I'll build you a bridge of the beams of the sun, to play upon us all
 And he built them a bridge of the beams of the sun and over the pools they played all three
 Then the mothers cried Mary call home your child, ere ours all drown in the sea.
 And when she asked him why, said he
 Oh I built them a bridge of beams of the sun, so they would play at ball with me."

A bridge of the beams of the sun: What could that be? Can we build a bridge of the beams of the sun? Can the sun be a reference to solar power? Can this ancient legend be a proxy for using solar power to bring royalty and poor together in harmony to save a planet? Can we join environmental justice and clean energy? Can solar power be a bridge between our use of fossil fuels and a sustainable future? Can we make this happen?



QUEENFISHER CALLING AT LAKE MERRITT – Hilary Powers –

The Belted Kingfisher in residence at the lake this year -- a female, recognizable by the bright orange cummerbund -- spent much of the morning of the December 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon bird walk swooping around the islands and giving her distinctive rattling cry. For a few moments, she hung in the air like a kite, then plunged straight down into the water... but emerged fishless.

All five expected heron species turned out for the enjoyment of the birders (at least 25, and some may have drifted in later) assembled for the walk.

(Photo: Queenfisher; Wikipedia)



We didn't see the local juvenile but the adult Great Blue Heron posed portrait-style in the cluster of bare branches on the island nearest the Rotary Nature Center -- a spot to check out anytime you walk near the lake with binoculars in hand; all sorts of wonderful birds sit there, often camouflaged

(Photo: Victoria Perman, 12/28/16, 4th Wednesday Birdwalk; Photo (r): Lee Aurich; aurich.com/photos)

(Continued)

against thick greenery. Today, even in brilliant sun, the bird was hard to see without optics -- and doubtless liked it that way. The Great Egret, on the other hand, was sitting on the chain-link fence box inside the duck paddock, 10 feet from the walkway and glowing like the rising moon. The Green Heron was doing its famous rock imitation on the rip-rap along the nearest island, again, very difficult to see unless you knew right where to look (or were simply examining every inch of the rip-rap, which is what you do if you want to see Green Herons and no one is there to point one out).

Out on the lake, we were still scarily without either Western or Clark's Grebes (the big ones) but had the



(Horned Grebe - Photo: Wikipedia)

other three regulars, including enough Horned and Eared Grebes to begin to get comfortable spotting the differences (at this time of year, white neck and flat head vs. gray neck and pointy head). At least two pair of Barrow's Goldeneyes (the rare one, with a crescent moon on the face of the drake) pattered around the islands and the floats, along with half a dozen pair of Common Goldeneyes (full moon on face), several Buffleheads, some copper-headed Canvasbacks, and what looked like a lot of Lesser and Greater Scaup to those who did not know how many more there should have been.



(Eared Grebe - Photo: Wikipedia)

The oaks three-quarters of the way from the playground to El Embarcadero -- usually bare of birds when the birdwalk passes by -- were hosting a big mixed flock, including Yellow-rumped Warblers (butter-butts), Bushtits (flying mice), a Black Phoebe, and a couple of others. Most notable: a pair of Orange-crowned Warblers, yellowish and greenish and totally lacking in distinguishing marks (not seen at the lake since December 2015), chased each other back and forth from tree to tree.

Across Bellevue we picked up most of the regulars and a couple of extras, including Dark-eyed Juncos and a California

Scrub Jay, but dipped on woodpeckers (not too surprising) as well as House Finches and House Sparrows. All told, we saw 44 species (down one from November) on a shining and amazingly not-too-cold day at Lake Merritt -- where every day has its own loveliness, but many make it harder to recognize than this one did.

HAPPENINGS AROUND THE LAKE -

AUDUBON BIRDWALKS AT THE LAKE: Join bird expert Hilary Powers every fourth Wednesday of the month for a free "Birdwalk" at the lake. Muster at the geodesic bird cage near the Nature Center at 9:30 for what are always fascinating introductions to lake birdlife.

OMCA (Oakland Museum of California): "Bees: Tiny Insect; Big Impact"; through June 2017. See: <http://museumca.org/>

EDITOR: Ray Perman - "The Tidings" is published by the Lake Merritt Institute (LMI) for the purpose of publicizing the work of the organization, as well as providing articles of interest regarding the environment, and natural and anthropological history of Lake Merritt, and its surroundings. Comments and contributed articles are welcome. Please feel free to contact me directly: ["rgperman@gmail.com"](mailto:rgperman@gmail.com) 