

## 2026 Bloom-Hays Ecological Research Grant and Zembal Wetland Research Grant

Presented by Sea and Sage Audubon Society

**Pete Bloom** is a current, and still active, member of Sea and Sage Audubon. In the 1970s and 1980s, Pete helped spearhead the Weir Canyon Conservation Fund to protect canyon lands from development. Weir Canyon was protected, and funds remaining from that campaign have been contributed to this grant opportunity.

Pete Bloom has lived in southern California most of his life and has spent much of the last 50 years studying raptors throughout the State. Known to most as one of the foremost experts in raptors, Pete has studied birds of prey in California, across the United States, and abroad in such places as Argentina, Sweden, and India.

As part of a bold step to rescue the California Condor from extinction, from 1982 through 1987, Pete worked with the National Audubon Society directing the efforts to capture all of the remaining California Condors in the wild. Locally, Pete and a small crew of dedicated researchers have been studying natal dispersal and philopatry of raptors, and its relevance to reserves and conservation, through a 40 year “mark and recapture” project in Orange County, north San Diego County, and western Riverside County.

Pete is also accomplished in herpetology, mammalogy, ornithology, and a fervent conservationist. He has taught Natural History of Southern California at Saddleback College and dedicates much of his time as a mentor to up-and-coming biologists. His experience with Sea and Sage Audubon, with the helpful guidance of Fern Zimmerman and Ferne Cohen in the 1970s, helped launch his academic career, deep respect for nature, and a lifelong effort to help others explore their potentials as scientists and researchers.

**Loren Hays** was a long-time friend and supporter of Sea and Sage Audubon Society. When he passed away in 2008, a memorial fund was gathered from Sea and Sage members to develop a grant fund program in his memory. Loren left a legacy as a protector of birds, especially endangered species, and an advocate of protecting the environment through cooperative process and skilled management.

Much of Loren’s professional life was spent as a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biologist where Loren embraced the concept of partnering between agencies and governmental bodies to promote conservation. In the 1980s, Loren began one of those partnerships with the Orange County Water District (OCWD) at the Prado Basin. At that time there were about 18 pairs of the endangered Least Bell’s Vireo nesting in the vast wetland system. By the time of Loren’s retirement in 2006, nearly 1,000 pairs nested in the basin due to the efforts of Loren, along with his good friend Richard Zembal. Loren also worked tirelessly towards the conservation of other species such as the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher in the Prado Basin and around the State, and the California Least Tern and Western Snowy Plover in Orange County’s coastal reserves. Loren’s knack for developing partnerships brought Sea and Sage Audubon and California State Parks together to set up the Huntington Beach Least Tern Colony - Volunteer Program.

Loren was a fervent protector of birds. He was a regular at Huntington Beach Central Park and enjoyed everything from the most common to the rarest of birds. He was a mentor to all.

**Richard Zembal** is also a long-time friend and supporter of Sea and Sage Audubon. Richard has worked on wetland restoration, wildlife research, and management since the 1960s. As a good friend to both Pete Bloom and the late Loren Hays, it is fitting that Richard Zembal also be honored alongside them for his contribution to conservation of wildlife habitat in Southern California.

Richard first worked alongside Loren at the USFWS, and later worked as his counterpart at OCWD, on the conservation and management of riparian habitat in Prado Basin, as described above. As the Director of Natural Resources Conservation for OCWD, Richard continues to work in coordination with the Santa Ana Watershed Association at Prado Basin to support conservation of the State's largest population of Least Bell's Vireo. This habitat management allowed for an increase in other special status riparian species including the Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, California Gnatcatcher, and several species of raptors. Richard also oversees management of Burris Basin in Anaheim, which has a 2.4-acre island that supports nesting for 11 species of seabirds, including the Endangered California Least Tern and the Black Skimmer.

Since 1985, Richard has served on the Board of Directors for the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy (HBWC), a community-based group of private citizens working to purchase remaining coastal wetlands along Pacific Coast Highway and to restore them to tidal influence. The Conservancy now owns and manages 127 acres of wetlands, including 27 acres of coastal dunes including Talbert Marsh, Brookhurst Marsh, Magnolia Marsh, and Newland Marsh. They also have an interpretative center with displays on the importance and functioning of coastal wetland habitats to educate and outreach to the public. Richard is the Principal Investigator overseeing funds to monitor and manage listed species, including the Light-footed Ridgway's Rail, Belding's Savannah Sparrow, and California Least Tern.

Since 1998, Richard has taught Natural History course at Saddleback College to connect college students with the natural world and to teach them how to observe and enjoy the outdoors. His desire to inspire and support the next generation of upcoming wildlife professionals led to his generous contribution to fund the new Zembal Wetland Research Grant.

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### **Application Instructions**

**Objective:** The objective of the Bloom-Hays Ecological Research Grant is to advance ecological research, particularly research related to avian species and the natural communities upon which they depend, by providing funds or supplies to support research activities benefitting native species and habitats in Southern California. The objective of the Zembal Wetland Research Grant is to advance ecological research related to coastal wetland habitats of Southern California, including habitats that support shorebirds and seabirds.

**Funding:** The size of each grant will vary between \$500 and \$5,000. The amount dispersed to each recipient will vary based on the number of proposals, the quality of proposals received, and the contribution of the proposed work to ecological research. The total funding available in 2026 is up to \$17,500. The Zembal Wetland Research Grant will only be awarded if there are applications received with suitable research topics to meet the objective. Note that a 1099 will be issued to each grant recipient by Sea & Sage Audubon for tax-reporting purposes.

**Eligibility:** Preference will be given to research projects related to avian species and habitats in Southern California. However, other ecological research projects whose results would be applicable to habitat issues in Southern California or general ecology will also be considered. Recipients of a Bloom-Hays Ecological Research Grant and the Zembal Wetland Research Grant will be eligible to apply for funds to continue the work in subsequent years, but will be required to submit a renewal application each year. Most grants are to be awarded to graduate students, but awards may be made to outstanding undergraduate students (judged separately from graduate student applications).

**General Instructions:** A complete application form must include: (1) Cover Letter; (2) Application; (3) Proposal/Budget; (4) Project Schedule; (5) Resume; and (6) Letter(s) of Reference. The same application will be used to submit for both grant opportunities. Submit the completed application package to [BloomHaysGrant@aol.com](mailto:BloomHaysGrant@aol.com). Committee prefers to receive one PDF file containing the complete application (reference letters may be submitted separately by the advisor or included in the application PDF).

**Deadline:** Application packages must be received by email no later than February 20, 2026. The Science Committee will accept only electronic submittals. An email reply confirming receipt of the application will be sent by February 21, 2026, or within one week of receipt if the application package is submitted early.

Applications will be evaluated by the Science Committee on the scientific merit of the proposed research; the applicant's ability to conduct the research; and the relevance of the proposed ecological research to the interests of native species and habitats in Southern California. Applicants will be informed of results via email by April 3, 2026. The name(s) of award recipient(s) will be published in the *Wandering Tattler* and the recipients will be recognized at the Summer BBQ (each recipient will receive two complimentary tickets to the BBQ).

**Cover Letter:** A cover letter should be included to introduce the applicant. It should be formatted as a letter addressed to Sea and Sage Audubon and provide a brief introduction to the objective of the project and how it relates to avian research and/or habitat issues in Southern California, list the name of the institution under which the research is being conducted, and include the applicant's contact information. If applicable, the cover letter should indicate that the proposal should also be considered for the Zembal Wetland Research Grant. (1 page)

**Applicant Information:** The attached form on the applicant's information should be completed in its entirety; applicants should be able to type directly into the PDF form. (See pages 6–7 of these instructions; 2 pages).

**Proposal:** The applicant should prepare a brief proposal to describe how the project objective will be accomplished. It should include the background to explain the purpose and need for the project. Assume that the reader does not know about the issue and explain why the research is important. It should briefly describe the methodology and techniques being used (especially if they are new) and the anticipated results. It should explain how the project results would achieve the objectives of this grant program. A map or graphic may be included but is not required. Be sure to spell out acronyms on first use. (2-3 pages maximum, not including the map/graphic or references)

**Budget:** A budget of projected expenditures and materials for the project should be listed. The budget should include assumptions (e.g., number of field days, mileage to sites, mileage rate used [current federal mileage rate is \$0.67/mile], field supply cost per unit/number of units, etc.) used to estimate the budget. The budget should be shown in a spreadsheet or table. Funds will not be given for conference attendance, tuition, stipend, or salary compensation. (0.5–1 page)

**Project Schedule:** A rough project schedule should be included (months/years). The project schedule should include anticipated months of fieldwork, data analysis, and project completion. The project schedule should be shown in a table or graphic. (0.5–1 page)

**Resume:** The applicant should include a resume showing his/her experience related to ecology and the environment. This resume may include work experience, participation in fieldwork related to coursework, volunteer activities, and/or other field experience. (1–2 pages)

**Letter of Reference:** One Letter of Reference should be prepared on behalf of the applicant. The letter should be from an advisor, professor, teacher, or teaching assistant who knows the student, or someone who has worked in a leadership role with the applicant. The letter can be submitted: (1) by the advisor via email to [BloomHaysGrant@aol.com](mailto:BloomHaysGrant@aol.com) with the student's name clearly referenced in the letter and the email; or (2) by the applicant within their package as a PDF with the letter on the school's letterhead and signed by the advisor. The Committee prefers to receive one Letter of Reference per applicant and will accept no more than two Letters of Reference for each applicant. (1–2 pages)

**Reporting:** Sea and Sage Audubon requests that grant recipients present the results of their research at a meeting of its members (e.g., 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday Conservation Lecture, General Meeting). Publications resulting from the research should be sent to the current Chair of the Science Committee to keep in the files of Sea and Sage Audubon ([BloomHaysGrant@aol.com](mailto:BloomHaysGrant@aol.com)).

## **2026 Bloom-Hayes Ecological Research Grant and Zembal Wetland Research Grant Application**

### **Applicant Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address (*where award letter/check will be mailed in April 2026*):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor (if graduate level): \_\_\_\_\_

Current Degree Program: PhD \_\_\_\_\_ Masters \_\_\_\_\_ Undergraduate \_\_\_\_\_

Should this research also be judged for the Zembal Wetland Research Grant? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

### **Project Information**

Title of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

When do you anticipate finishing your degree? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Project Information**

Title of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

List 3 keywords/phrases to describe your project: (e.g., habitat fragmentation, Least Bell's Vireo, riparian, nest success, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

City, County where project will be conducted: \_\_\_\_\_

Specific location(s) where project will be conducted (e.g., Audubon's Starr Ranch Sanctuary, UCI Ecological Preserve, etc.):  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Getting to Know the Applicant**

What are your goals after you finish your degree?

How did you develop an interest in birds/nature?

Where is your favorite place to hike, birdwatch, or interact with nature in Southern California? Why?