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STEC Newsletter Editor -Edward Meza

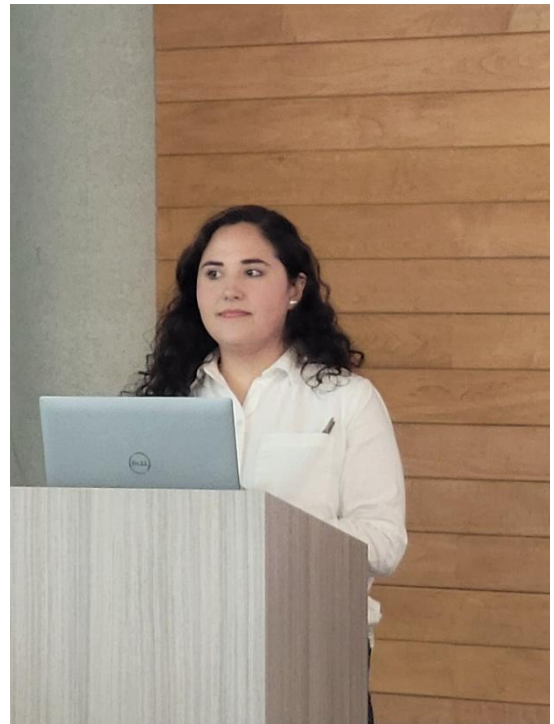
First Year Anniversary Celebrated

The South Texas Ecotourism Center celebrated its first-year anniversary on Saturday, February 25th 2023 with “Films, Popcorn & Nature”. Various documentaries including “Deep in the Heart” and “The Bahia Grande” were shown as well as an educational booth from Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge, and a native plant sale by the Laguna Madre Museum Foundation and Driftwood Garden Club. The STEC Educational Lab offered hands-on activities for the kids and visitors toured the Center. Popcorn was served and Tacos by Pelon was a hit with the patrons. It was an overall success with over 200 people stopping by to participate. The Center opened on February 22, 2022.

The South Texas Ecotourism Center is a Cameron County operated nature museum and information center dedicated to the education and preservation of South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley six ecosystems. The Center offers outdoor exhibits with interpretive panels with QR codes, sculpture of native animals, over 48,000 native plants, a look out pavilion with two telescopes and binoculars to view the wildlife at the Center and at the Bahia Grande Unit of the Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge. The Center has brochures on south Texas and Valley nature centers and parks. The Center is located at 501 State Highway 100 in Laguna Vista, Texas. Open 7 days a week from 8 am to 5 pm. Free Admission. (956) 772-0210.

STEC Speakers Series

Our popular STEC Speakers Series was created in the Fall of 2022. Speakers presented a variety of nature related topics such as bird migrations, floating gardens and light pollution. Our Spring Speaker Series again brings you a diverse array of experienced professionals in the field with topics that are important to our ecology in the area. Bringing educational programs about preservation and appreciation of our diverse ecosystems in South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley is one of the goals of the South Texas Ecotourism Center. The presentations are on Thursdays in March and April from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Free Admission. Refreshments served.



Elena Flores

Photo Credit: Sharon



Spring Speaker Series 2023

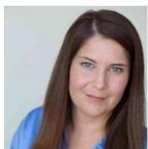
March 23 to April 27 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

March 23rd Elena Flores- **Mangroves**



Elena Flores earned a Bachelors of Science in Biology from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2018. From the same University, Elena concluded a Master of Science in Ocean, Coastal, and Earth Sciences in 2022. During her masters degree she was awarded as a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scholar under the Center for Coastal and Marine Ecosystems (CCME).

March 30th Sharon (Shari) Wilcox- **Ocelots in Texas**



Shari earned her Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Texas at Austin. She is the co-editor of the book, *Historical Animal Geographies* (2018) and has authored a number of scholarly articles and book chapters examining contemporary and historical interactions of humans and wild cats in the U.S. Mexico borderlands. Shari is the Senior Texas Representative with Defenders of Wildlife.

April 6th George Garcia- **Laguna Atascosa, a South Texas Treasure**



George "Georgie" Garcia is the Visitor Services Manager with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services at Laguna Atascosa NWR with five years of experience helping to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

April 13th Dr. William C. Davis- **This Place: N 26° 8' 41", W 97° 21' 55"**



William C. Davis has lived in Cameron County, south Texas for over 70 years. He and his wife Lynda have lived on This Place for 50 years and raised their children there. Dr. Davis enjoyed a 40 year career teaching in Texas Southmost College and the University of Texas at Brownsville. Dr. Davis will talk about the history of a small plot of land on the south Texas frontier.

April 20th Roberto Gaitan- **Exploring your backyard with iNaturalist**



Robert Gaitan is a valley native and is currently serving his third year as the President of the Rio Grande Valley Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist. Robert believes that only through a unified public effort can we hope to maintain this Texas oasis for our native plants and animals. He will teach about the fun tool, iNaturalist, to give everyone the skills to put a name to everything they find in their own backyard.

The South Texas Ecotourism Center Speaker Series is part of the educational goals of the Center to teach important aspects of the various ecosystems in South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

Every Thursday from March 23 to April 27, there will be a different speaker with an interesting topic starting at 5:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served. Free Admission.

The Center is located at 501 W. State Highway 100 in Laguna Vista, Texas

For more information call (956) 772-0210 www.stec-lv.org



STEC Spring Break Camp a Success

Our STEC Ecosystem Specialist/ Educator Mary Shannon McGinley—White has come up with some wonderful educational programs for this year. One of the programs was the STEC Spring Break Camp. The camp included four days of hands on educational programs that covered the ecosystems presented at the Center. Students enjoyed the lessons, walking tours, outdoor projects and indoor games and crafts. The students, ages 6 to 11 were introduced into nature and all that it offers. Students were given a notebook to document what they learned and observed. We thank volunteers Sharon McGinley, Misty Ponder and Alicia Cavazos who helped with the camp. Certificates were given out to all the students and volunteers who participated in the camp. Look for the Summer Camp Flyer in this Newsletter.



Photo Credit: Misty Ponder





SOUTH TEXAS ECOTOURISM CENTER SUMMER CAMP 2023 JUNE 5TH—29TH

9am—12pm (Noon)

Kids Ages 7-11

Must be 7 at the start of Camp

\$50.00 A WEEK OR \$150 FOR THE MONTH



Week 1 June 5-8

Week 2 June 12—15

Week 3 June 19– 22

Week 4 June 26– 29

**TO REGISTER COME INTO THE
SOUTH TEXAS ECOTOURISM CENTER**

6 ECOSYSTEMS

BIRDING

LAB ACTIVITIES

FIELD RESEARCH

TEAM BUILDING

ARTS & CRAFTS



South Texas Ecotourism Center



STEC_Lv



501 W Tx Hwy 100 Laguna Vista Tx 78578

Staying Healthy at the STEC



FREE MORNING CLASSES
AT 10:00AM

MON&WED: MEDITATION AND
YOGA

TUE&THURSDAY: STRENGTH AND
TONING

The South Texas Ecotourism Center has partnered with “Tu Salud Si Quenta”, a community health program sponsored by the UTHealth Houston School of Public Health that presents free health and exercise classes for the public. The classes are presented by Martha Campos, Exercise Instructor and overseen by Cecilia Zamora, Community Health Worker. The surrounding beauty of the STEC is ideal for yoga and meditation classes as well as strength and toning instruction. Classes are presented at different areas of the Center including the side portico, look out bridge, amphitheater, bird blinds, and outdoor classroom. Classes are presented at 10 a.m. Mondays and Wednesdays for meditation and yoga and Tuesdays and Thursdays for strength and toning. To participate show up at these times



Photo credits: Martha



Spring Time

at the STEC

Calendar of Events

March 20th—Monday ~ Spring Equinox/First Day of Spring

Come help us count our Flowering Plants and Trees at the Center.

8 am to 5 pm

April 8th—Saturday ~ Pre -Easter Activity

Come decorate Easter images on paper and enjoy the beautiful flowers at the Center.

10 am to 4 pm

April 22nd—Saturday ~ Earth Day

Celebrating Earth Day with Native Plant Sale and Hands On Activities.

8 am to 4 pm

May 5th—Friday ~ Cinco De Mayo

Come celebrate Cinco de Mayo at the STEC with traditional dance and music performances, Chalupa-STEC/Plant and Wildlife Theme, Food Vendors, Native Plants and their Traditional Uses

6 pm to 8 pm

May 13th—Saturday ~ Mother's Day Brunch

Come celebrate with Mom at the STEC with Rose and Candy give away to first 100 Mother's, Mother's Day Card Making (seed paper) & Refreshments

11 am to 2 pm

FOR MORE INFORMATION: (956) 772-0210

WWW.STEC-LV.ORG

South Texas Ecotourism Center, 501 W. STATE HIGHWAY 100, Laguna Vista, Texas 78578



South Texas Ecotourism Center



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STEC Staff and Volunteers to receive their Texas Master Naturalist Certifications



Mary Shannon McGinley—White
STEC Ecosystem Specialist
Educator



Pablo Medrano
STEC Ecosystem Specialist
Educator



Sharon McGinley
STEC Volunteer
Educator

Mary Shannon McGinley-White and Pablo Medrano both Ecosystem Specialists and Educators for the Center as well as Volunteer Sharon McGinley are participating in the 2023 Class of the Texas Master Naturalists. Director Edward Meza was certified last year as a Texas Master Naturalist and new STEC Volunteers Susan Manning and Jody Nelsen are also participating in the TMN 2023 Class.

The Texas Master Naturalist Program's mission is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas. Many communities and organizations rely on such citizen volunteers for implementing youth education programs, for operating parks, nature centers, and natural areas; and for providing leadership in local natural resource conservation efforts.



One of the world's most popular nature apps, iNaturalist helps you identify the plants and animals around you. Get connected with a community of over a million scientists and naturalists who can help you learn more about nature! What's more, by recording and sharing your observations, you'll create research quality data for scientists working to better understand and protect nature. iNaturalist is a joint initiative by the [California Academy of Sciences](https://www.calacademy.org/) and the [National Geographic Society](https://www.natsoc.org/). [Www.inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)



STEC Receives Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Seed Grant



The South Texas Ecotourism Center received a grant from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Seed Grant. The Seed Grant was established for communities to grow more wildflowers in their area. Our project will include a 500 square foot section of the center to be made into a wildflower garden. We will be having the students from our Summer Camp program to be involved with the creation and planting of this garden which was a requirement of the grant to have youth involved. We will be receiving a \$100 gift certificate to be used at the Native American Seed Company.

Schedule Your School and Organization Tours Now

We recommend that you start scheduling your classes or organizations for touring the South Texas Ecotourism Center at least two weeks prior to your touring date. Please call (956) 772-0210. Tours are free and last up to one and a half hours depending on the size of the group. If you would like to have your lunch at the Center, we have a multipurpose room that can accommodate 70 people to eat comfortably. Please let us know at the time of your scheduling if you need to use the multipurpose room. We will divide the students depending on the size of the group and one group will see the short film, the others tour the educational lab and the rest divided throughout the Center's exhibits.



Sign up to Volunteer at the STEC!

We welcome and appreciate volunteers at the STEC. We have volunteer opportunities for welcoming the public, working in the gardens and exhibits, school tours, and during special events. Hours are flexible. We are open 7 days a week from 8 am to 5 pm. Call (956) 772-0210 for more information and to sign up.

RENTAL OPPORTUNITIES AT STEC

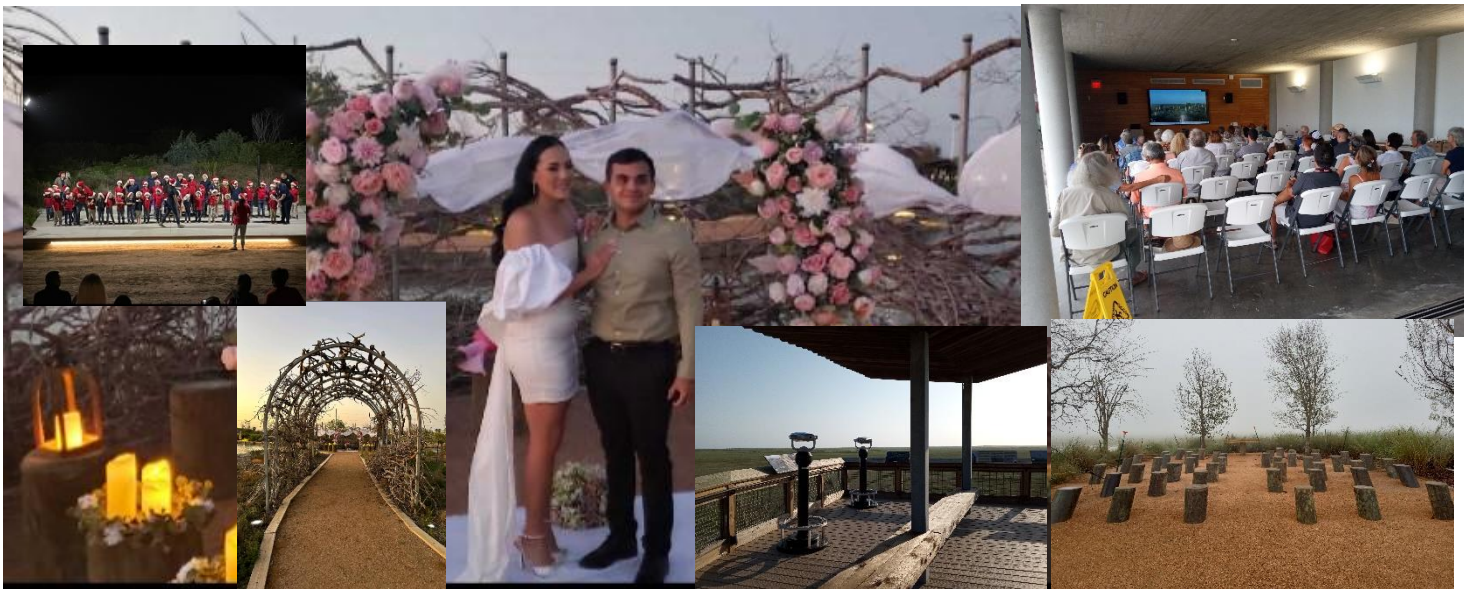


- MEETING ROOM
- OVERLOOK RAMP
- OUTDOOR CLASSROOM
- BIRD BLINDS
- AMPHITHEATER

CALL (956) 772-0210 FOR INFORMATION

Have your next event, engagement proposal, wedding, graduation party, or corporate meeting at the STEC. We have affordable rental fees for groups up to 70 in the multipurpose room to up to 150 at the amphitheater. Other areas to rent at the STEC are the Bird Blinds, the Look Out Pavilion, and Outdoor Classroom. Pick up a rental fee contract at the STEC, download from our website www.stec-lv.org, or email edward.meza@co.cameron.tx.us for a copy.

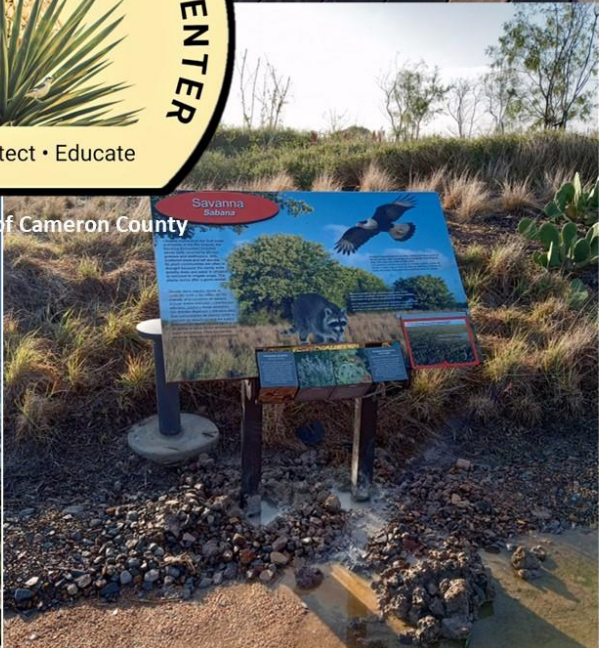
Photo Credits: Oscar Del Abra, Edward Meza



EXPLORE, PROTECT, EDUCATE

WWW.STEC-LV.ORG WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/STECLV (956) 772-0210

Outdoor Hands On Exhibits ; Wildlife Sculptures; 48K native plants; Amphitheatre; Meeting Room; Outdoor Class Room; Wifi , Rentals



A Department of Cameron County

OPEN DAILY 8AM-5PM FREE ADMISSION

501 W. STATE HWY 100, LAGUNA VISTA, TEXAS

Preserving the Unique Ecosystems of South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley

STEC STAFF: Edward Meza, Director
Jeremy Christensen, Office Specialist
Mary Shannon McGinley—White , Ecosystem Specialist/Educator
Pablo Medrano, Ecosystem Specialist /Educator
Jose Angel Martinez, Maintenance Specialist