



STEC Newsletter Editor -Edward Meza **Summer/Fall 2024 Edition**

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STEC Awarded TEXAN by NATURE Certification

South Texas Ecotourism Center Director Edward Meza applied for the "Texan by Nature Project Certification" a state wide competitive certification which recognizes Texas employers, organizations, and individuals with recognition of meaningful conservation efforts involving and benefiting people, prosperity, and natural resources. STEC was recognized for its design of the facility taken into consideration of water and nature conservation, use of natural resources, promotion of ecotourism and its educational projects and events that promote the five ecosystems of the Rio Grande Valley and South Texas. We are proud to have received this recognition. More on page 20.



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's 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.



South Texas Ecotourism Center

FALL
SPEAKER
series
EVERY OTHER
THURSDAY

September 12th to February 20th
5:30PM-7:00PM



REFRESHMENTS
AND SNACKS
PROVIDED

501 W. State Hwy 100, Laguna Vista, Texas 78578 (956) 772-0210
www.stec-lv.org

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.



SUMMER schedule

MARTHA CAMPOS

CERTIFIED EXERCISE INSTRUCTOR



	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00- 8:50AM @ROLOFF PARK, 122 FERNANDEZ ST. LAGUNA VISTA, TX 78578	ZUMBA	ZUMBA TONING	ZUMBA	ZUMBA TONING	ZUMBA
9:10-10:10AM @SOUTH TEXAS ECOTOURISM CENTER, 501 W. STATE HIGHWAY 100 LAGUNA VISTA, TX.	MEDITATION & YOGA	STRENGT & TONING	MEDITATION & YOGA	STRENGT & TONING	



STEC Receives Awards for Architecture Design and Contractor Work

The South Texas Ecotourism Center was recognized on state and national level for its architectural design and construction successes. Megamorphosis Design from Harlingen was presented the AIALRGV Honor Design Award for its unique design and use of natural materials of the STEC building that complimented its natural surroundings. Noble Texas Builders LLC was presented an Outstanding Construction Award by AGC Texas Building Branch and an National Excellence in Construction Award by the Associated Builders and Contractors for its challenges faced during construction which included hot and inclement weather, unstable and wet surfaces, rattlesnakes and scorpions to name a few. Congratulations to both of these fine companies..



Photo:
Angel Martinez

BIRDING NOTES

by Marilyn Lorenz

photos by Chuck Lorenz

There are a number of interesting creatures that live in the marshlands, most of them are in the families of herons and rails. Herons are usually large, rather easy to see, and often quite beautiful. Rails, on the other hand, are much smaller, browner, and quite covert. Sneaking around in our wetlands there is a curious creature (of the black lagoon?) known as the Common Gallinule, *Gallinula chloropus*.

Our poor gallinule has an identity crisis. In America they were always known as gallinules but their close cousins in Europe and Asia are called moorhens. American ornithologists eventually bowed to the standardization of the taxonomy and changed our gallinules into moorhens. In 2011 the name Common Moorhen was changed back to Common Gallinule. As usual, the birders were confused, there is no report on how the birds felt about it.

They are medium-sized rail-like birds with rather stubby wings and your first thought on seeing one might well be that that's a funny-looking duck. A strange duck indeed. The bill is conical rather than broad and flat, and those feet are definitely not webbed. They have a glossy black plumage with a little white trim on the flanks, and they wear snazzy red garters. The most striking feature is the red "shield" that covers the upper half of the bill and extends well upward onto the forehead. This the first thing you are likely to notice about them. Not as obvious are their amazing feet. At the ends of their rather long, yellow-green legs are yellow-green feet with enormously long toes.

Our birds are resident here and through the summer they are busy nesting and raising young. They lay eight to fourteen buffy eggs with brown spots. Because the eggs begin to incubate as soon as they are laid, the chicks emerge over a period of as much as two weeks. There are few things more bizarre looking than a young gallinule. Baby ducks are Cute! Baby gallinules – not so much. They are covered with short, black down, except that the covering is thin on the head and shiny patches of skin show through. The wings are short stubs that look severely damaged, the bodies look like fuzzy black ping-pong balls, and all this is balanced on ridiculously long legs with huge feet.

They are precocious and follow mom into the water within minutes of hatching and learn to forage immediately but they still need mom for directions and protection. They feed on greens and seeds, as well as spiders and small insects. They are not very good at flying and it is always humorous to watch one running across the top of the water pumping its wings desperately trying to achieve liftoff acceleration. They are, however, very good at getting around in soft mud and marshy areas. Those big feet are perfect for walking safely on the lightest of vegetation.

If you would like to see some of these curious birds for yourself there is a nice population of them living on South Padre Island and you can safely see our "swimming chickens" from the boardwalk at the Birding and Nature Center there.

As a treat and for comparison I have included a picture of a "Purple Gallinule." They are not common here but are occasionally seen on South Padre Island. They are the same size but most definitely have a purple hue and the red shield on the face becomes a lovely shade of sky blue as it rises to the forehead. (see photos on next page)

photos by Chuck Lorenz



Common Moorhen



Common Gallinule

STEC Premieres Richard Moore 's New Documentary "One Refuge, One Camera, One Year"

STEC THEATER

movie premiere

ONE REFUGE, ONE CAMERA, ONE YEAR

RICHARD MOORE

saturday, november 9th 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

The film is about the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge filmed by Richard Moore, South Texas wildlife photographer and film maker. It is scheduled for Saturday, November 9th at 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. at the STEC Multipurpose Room. Free admission and popcorn.



“MARKET DAY”

Sat., Sept. 21, 2024 - 10am - 2pm

MUSIC



SOUTH TEXAS ECOTOURISM CENTER



Explore • Protect • Educate
501 W. STATE HWY 100
LAGUNA VISTA, TX
956-772-0212



FOOD





Coffee with the Birds

Everyday 9 am to 11 am

Serving *Tree Frog Coffee*

locally roasted in Bayview, Texas

Eco-friendly



Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) known as a sea hawk, river hawk or fish hawk is a diurnal, fish-eating bird of prey with a cosmopolitan range.



Caracara (*Caracara plancus*) is a black and white falcon that looks like a hawk and acts like a vulture.



Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) sometimes also referred at as the black-shouldered kite, is a small bird of prey from the Accipitridae family, known for hovering over open grasslands.

BIRDS OF PREY AT THE STEC

Free Event

South Texas Ecotourism Center

Fall Speaker Series

Complementary Refreshments & Snacks



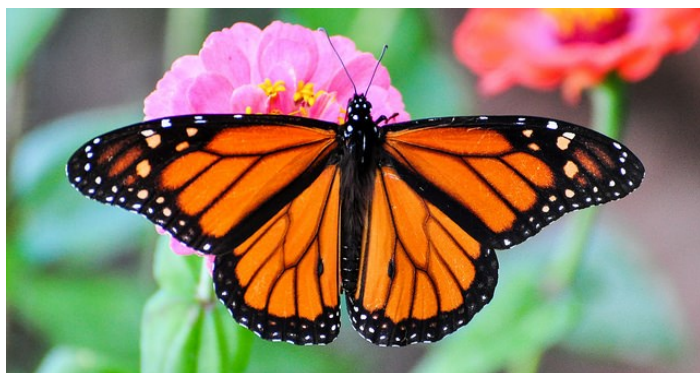
501 W Tx Hwy 100 Laguna Vista Tx 78578 www.stec-lv.org (956) 772-0212

Thursday September 12

5:30pm-7:00pm



The Rio Grande Valley Pollinator Project (RGVPP) will be on deck to chat about monarch butterflies, native milkweed and much more! With Fall migration underway, the RGVPP is excited to share tips and tricks to support all of our pollinators. The Rio Grande Valley Pollinator Project was founded by like-minded individuals after witnessing the lack of habitat for the monarch migration during tagging season. The RGVPP has since heightened pollinator awareness, advocated for native plant ecosystems, and are engaged in community's call-to-action across the Rio Grande Valley. Don't miss this great opportunity to find out about available grants, how they are distributing milkweed across the valley, and their rescue/relocation of native milkweed as well. Please join us on September 12th at STEC to learn more about the Project and take home free resources to get started in your own backyard.



STEC Staff:

Edward P. Meza, Director

Sofia Garza, Ecotourism Specialist/
Educator

Pablo Medrano, Office Specialist/
Educator

Jose Angel Martinez,

Maintenance Specialist/Educator

Roman C. Martinez

Maintenance Worker

Event Calendar - May to December 2024

Sept 2: STEC Closed for Labor Day Holiday

Sept 7: RGV Chapter of Native Plant Society meeting. 8a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sept 10: RGV Chapter Texas Master Naturalists meeting. 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Sept 12: Fall Speaker Series—"Monarchs, Milkweed, and Migration" 5:30 –7:00 p.m. Free Admission

Sept 21: STEC Market Day 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Sept 26: Fall Speaker Series –TBA 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Sept 27: Master Gardeners meeting 8:30 am to 2 p.m.

Oct 10: Fall Speaker Series –Allen Williams, Region One " Outdoor Learning Centers" 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Oct 17 : Fall Speaker Series –Sharon Wilcox "Ocelots" 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Oct 24: Fall Speaker Series –TBA 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Oct 27: STEC participating at the SPI Birding "Hallowings" Event 11 a..m. to 5 p.m.

Nov 7: Fall Speaker Series –TBA 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Nov 9: Premier showing of Richard Moore Documentary about the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Nov 28 :- Thanksgiving Holiday STEC Closed

Nov 29: -Thanksgiving Holiday STEC Closed

Dec 5: STEC Christmas Event 6 to 8p.m. Free Admission

Dec 10: RGV Chapter Texas Master Naturalists meeting. 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Dec 12: participating with RGV Coastal Expo Pharr

Dec 12: Fall Speaker Series –Alda Beltri "Community Gardens". Free Admission

Dec 13: participating with RGV Coastal Expo Pharr

Dec 19: Fall Speaker Series –TBA 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Dec 25: Christmas Holiday—STEC Closed

Dec 26: Christmas Holiday– STEC Closed

Jan 9: Fall Speaker Series– Karen Weaver "Texas Tortoises" 5:30 to 7 p.m.

Jan 15: 2025 TMN Class Training 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Jan 16: Fall Speaker Series –TBA 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Jan 30: Fall Speaker Series –TBA 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Feb 6: Fall Speaker Series –TBA 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

Feb 20: Fall Speaker Series –Robert Gaitan, "Native Plant Center at SPI" 5:30 to 7 p.m. Free Admission

New events will be added.

Texas Nature Book Club Meetings

Tuesdays at noon at the STEC.

Open to the public.

Where to purchase Native Plants in the Valley!

RGV Native Plant Resources

(Updated 2024)

Harlingen

Grimsell Seed Company (956) 423-0370

Heep's Nursery, Mike Heep (956) 457-6834

Stuart Place Nursery (956) 428-4439

Wild August Nursery (956) 535-2117

La Joya

Perez Ranch Nursery (956) 580-8915

Mission

Oleander Nursery (956) 607-3304

National Butterfly Center (956) 583-5400

Rio Grande City

Rancho Lomita Nursery (956) 486-2576

San Benito

River Oks Nursery (956) 399-4078

Weslaco

Valley Nature Center (956) 969-2475

Alamo

Mid Valley Garden and Pond (956) 650-0581

Kautsch True Value (956) 787-2721

Other resources:

Rio Grande Valley Pollinator Project: resources, information, presentations, classes etc.

rgvpollinatorproject@gmail.com

Native Plant Project:: resources, guides, handbooks, plant listings, etc. <https://>

Penitas

Native Trees Nursery (956) 890-5316

La Feria

Los Ebanos Farms (956) 565-2993

Donna

South Texas Palms (956) 605-7266

McAllen

Southern Landscapes (956) 618-1899

Brownsville

Southmost Preserve -Marco.ruiz@tnc.org

Laguna Vista

South Texas Ecotourism Center (956) 772-8q 210



Schedule Your School and Organizations Tours Now



Look out boardwalk.



Multipurpose Room.



Outdoor Classroom

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 to reserve your date. 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 60 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 up depending on the size of the group and one group will view the short film, the others tour the educational lab and the rest divided throughout the Center's exhibits.

Plan your Special Occasion at the STEC

RENTAL OPPORTUNITIES AT STEC



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

CALL (956) 772-0210 FOR INFORMATION

Beautiful , Unique and Affordable Venue!

- WEDDINGS
- BIRTHDAY PARTIES
- ANNIVERSARIES
- GRADUATION PARTIES
- CORPORATE MEETINGS
- ANNUAL MEETINGS
- CHRISTMAS PARTIES
- BUSINESS MEETINGS
- ENGAGEMENTS

Group Size: Multipurpose Room: 60 Amphitheater : 150 Outdoor Classroom: 46 Bird Archway: 10 Viewing Boardwalk Outlook 20

STEC Visitor Attendance

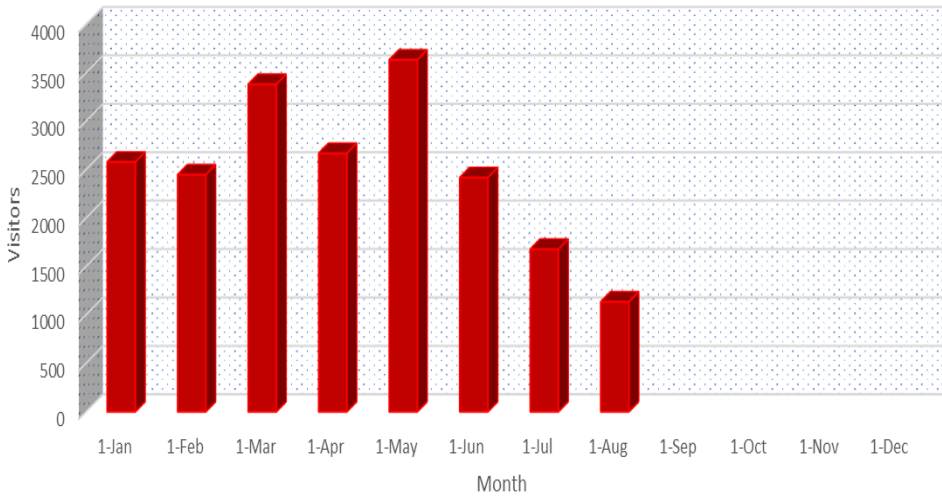
Attendance at the South Texas Ecotourism Center increases every year:

2022 **8,023**
2023 **20,068**
2024 **19,936 (Jan—July)**

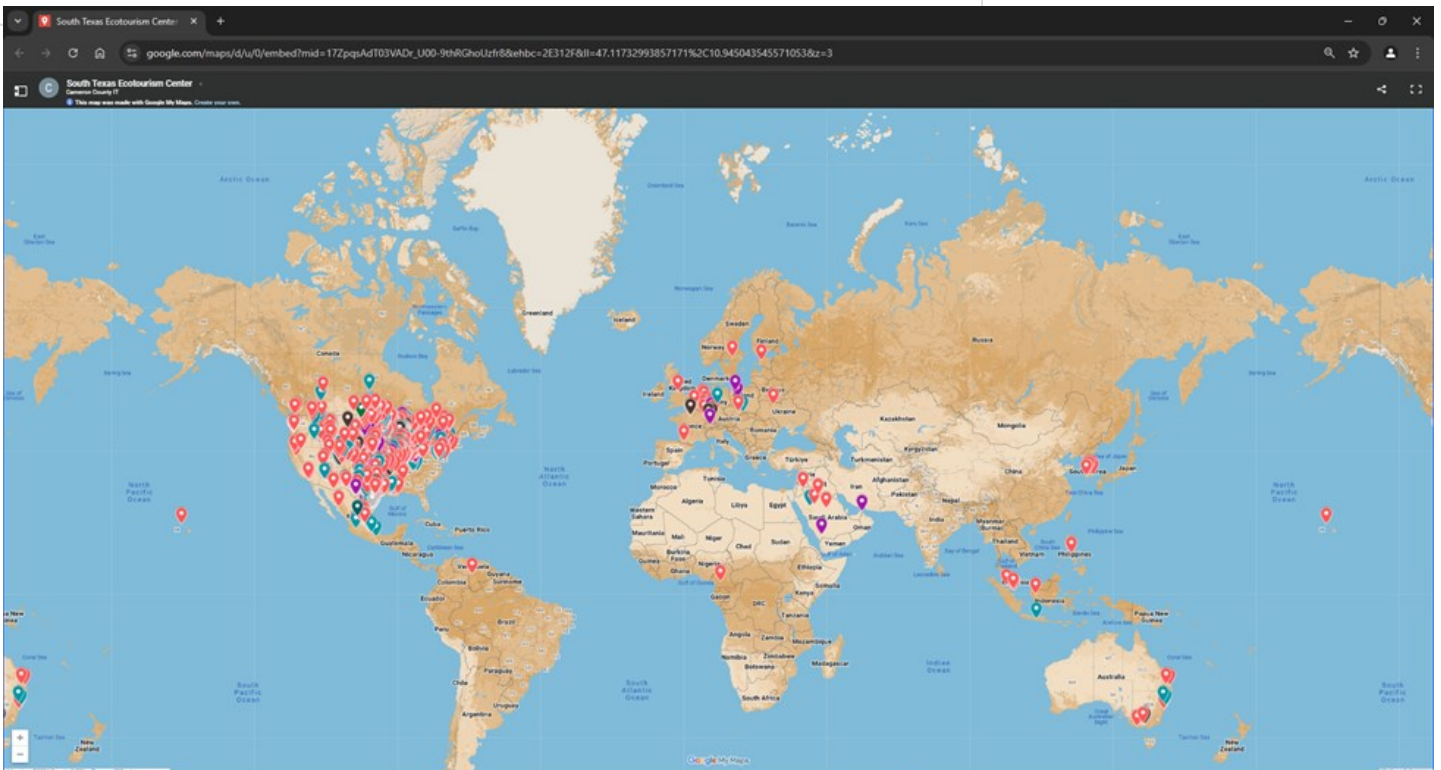
22-Jan 22-Feb 22-Mar 1-Apr 22-May 22-Jun 22-Jul 22-Aug 22-Sep 22-Oct 22-Nov 22-Dec
 2578 2447 3381 2668 3633 2417 1678 1134

Total
19936

Vistors Per Month



2024



Educational Tour of the King Ranch

On Friday, August 2nd, STEC staff and volunteers took an educational excursion to the historic King Ranch in Kingsville where they learned about the Ranch's native grass and plant conservation program, the history and operation of the ranch, the gift shop and about the history of the Nilgai. This tour was very beneficial to our staff and volunteers. We had King Ranch staff present us with talks about the Nilgai, about their native plant and conservation program, and how they operated their gift shop, Speakers included Janice Travis, Tour Supervisor and Jimmy McBee, Assistant Area Manager /Wildlife and SCHS biologist. Our tour guide Marlett Bahn was excellent. For more information on the King Ranch. Log on to <https://king-ranch.com>



Photo: Janice Travis, King Ranch Staff

Photo starting from left back row:

Pablo Medrano, Office Specialist/ Educator; Sofia Garza, Ecosystem Specialist/Educator; Mari Galvan, Community Outreach Coordinator, Pct.3; Norma Tovar, Vol.; Marilyn Lorenz, Vol.; Duanne Rasmussen, Vol.; Edward Meza, STEC Director; Angel Martinez, Maintenance Specialist/ Educator; Front Row: Sharon McGinley, Vol.; Becky Tovar, Vol.; Elma Arredondo, Volunteer.



Texas Longhorn

Photo: Sofia Garza, STEC



King Ranch Horse Stables

Photo: Sofia Garza, STEC

Educational Lab of the STEC

Our educational lab is used for classes, hands on activities and includes displays, an aquarium and microscopes for visitors to use.



When visiting the STEC, explore the wonders of the natural world specifically of South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley by visiting our educational lab! Microscopes and viewing lenses are available to observe natural items. Come see our specimen collection and observe our aquarium with native fish found from our pond. Our hands on activities are perfect for all ages. Pick up a copy of our STEC Activity Booklet and partake in our native sculpture scavenger hunt.

Sofia Garza

Ecosystem Specialist/Educator

(956) 772-0219



Add us on Facebook:

South Texas Ecotourism Center



Follow us on Instagram:

STEC_LvTX

WEBPAGE:

www.stec-lv.org



STEC



HALLOWEEN FESTIVAL

JOIN US FOR A NIGHT OF FRIGHTFUL FUN, TRICK OR TREAT TRAILS, HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES, AND FABULOUS COSTUME CONTEST



TRICK OR TREAT

SOUTH TEXAS ECOTOURISM CENTER



Explore · Protect · Educate

501 W. HWY 100
LAGUNA VISTA, TX 78568
956-772-0212





Thursday, December 5, 2024

6 to 8 p.m. FREE

For More Information call (956) 772-0210

501 W. State Hwy 100, Laguna Vista, TX

[Www.stec-lv.org](http://www.stec-lv.org)

Food, Music, Vendors, Crafts





A Department of Cameron County



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

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

TEXAS by NATURE continued



2024 TEXAS BY NATURE CERTIFIED ORGANIZATIONS FROM AROUND TEXAS



2024
Sellmark Ranch >
Teague, TX



2024
South Texas Ecotourism Center >
Laguna Vista, TX



2024
ELSO Inc. Studio Justice Program >
Beaumont, TX



2024
Preserve the Prairie >
Frisco, TX



2024
Pecan Spring Ranch >
Menard, TX



2024
Beevo Beekeeping Society >
Austin, TX



2024
Yaupon AgWorks >
Cat Spring, TX



2024
Presidio Green Infrastructure Initiative >
Presidio, TX