

Excitement grows at STEC

Article & photos by Ed Meza
Rio Grande Valley Chapter

Since the opening of the South Texas Ecotourism Center (STEC) in Laguna Vista this past February, there has been a lot going on at the Center. We are receiving a steady amount of visitors to the Center as well as holding a number of events.



San Isidro Grade 6-8 tour (photo by Paula Guzman)



Events at STEC have included: Volunteer Training Class, Texas Master Naturalist 2022 Class Graduation, Cameron County Parks Department Job Fair, the showing of two Richard Moore documentaries, RGV Texas Master Naturalist Chapter Meeting, and a number of school tours. In addition, many birdwatchers and visitors are looking for all kinds of birds and other wildlife which inhabit the area.

RGV Chapter meeting at STEC in May

The Center's main sign was placed on the premises in early May. The sign is 22 feet high and has a digital screen. The staff designed the STEC logo and is working on several projects including: preparing the gift shop in the lobby area, designing a brochure, and creating summer programs for our youth. A rental agreement/contract is being created and the school curriculum for grades 2nd to 8th is almost completed.

In the outdoor areas, additional signage which welcome and direct visitors and identify plants are being created. There are several animal sculptures that are almost completed and include an alligator, pelican, owl, hawk and deer. With spring and summer kicking in, the plants and trees have sprouted and are blooming. What a difference since the winter time!



New digital sign installed in May



Wildlife can be observed here. We have had two Killdeer nests with successful hatches. The mommas and their babies have been seen in the Savannah outdoor display and the parking lot. We have a nest of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers on our cedar elm trees at the Amphitheater. Our two resident jackrabbits sometimes welcome our visitors who are lucky enough to see them. We also had a baby opossum visit us and then wander off to hopefully join its mother.

Killdeer eggs camouflage well in rocks

Many wildflowers are in full bloom. Our horse crippers bloomed beautifully earlier this season.



Vibrant flowers of the Coral bean



Eye catching blooms of Horse crippler cactus

Volunteers are welcomed to help at the STEC. Each Wednesday from 9:00 to 11:30 am, we welcome volunteers Roberto Gaitan and Barbara Peet. They help us keep the outdoor exhibits clean from unwanted weeds. During our school tour, we had three volunteers who helped with the students. We have set up a volunteer room to keep their personal items, rest, and visit. Cold drinks and fresh fruit are always available to our volunteers.

Admission is free at the Center, as well as the use of the viewers on top of the look out. Our hours are from 8 am to 5 pm seven days a week. We plan to change those our hours of operation in late June to accommodate the heat levels during that time.