

TMN Joy!

Article & photo by Joyce Baer-Halpern, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

My husband and I have been coming to South Padre Island (SPI) off and on for 39 years. It has been the beach and its environs that draw me back... and the restaurants and things to do and ease of being here...and the Roseate Spoonbills and Sanderlings and the monarch butterflies and...the turtle sanctuary at Sea Turtle, Inc. We had the privilege years ago of seeing Ila Loetscher "the Turtle Lady," explain her mission: conservation of the Kemp's ridley sea turtles and ecological concerns.

An advertisement in the local paper said.....you might be interested... in becoming a Texas Master Naturalist with the Rio Grande Valley Chapter. What surprising, delightful, unexpected new adventures I've experienced by joining the current Texas Master Naturalist Trainee Class. What joy! Can you see it reflected in the photo below on my first day of volunteering?

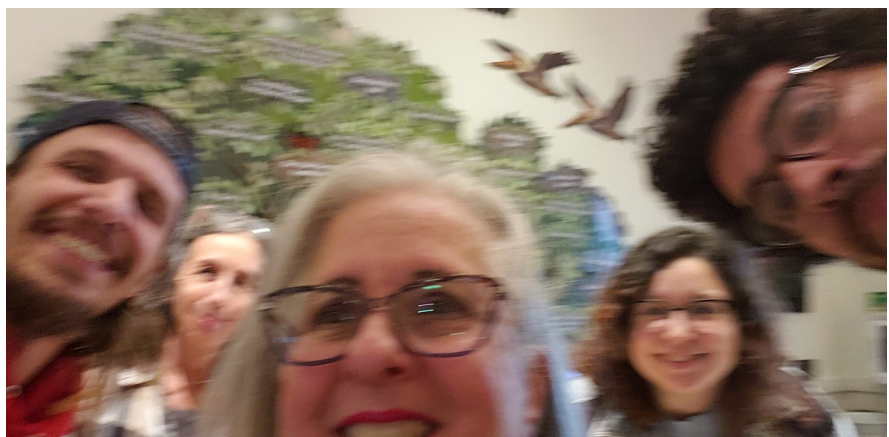
So, there's **discovery**. And work, too. There are classes, speakers, textbook reading, field trips and volunteering, such as being willing to write this article to convey my excitement about this adventure. It amazes me how much there is to do and to learn.

The South Texas Ecotourism Center (STEC) in Laguna Vista is relatively new, celebrating its one year anniversary in February. Experiencing, restoring and preserving the natural landscape...its "mission is to encourage the exploration of South Texas by highlighting its assets, spreading across the counties." It is a spectacular place to watch the sunset. STEC is where I first met Barbara Peet, the 2023 New Class Training Director. Barbara's breadth of knowledge and enthusiasm is motivating and contagious.

Exploring – the state parks and national wildlife refuges, the world birding sites. Our field trip to Resaca de la Palma State Park was eye opening with color - Green Jays and Altamira Orioles, andlive armadillos. A picture of the Green Jay is featured on the cover of *The Birds of South Texas including the Lower Rio Grande Valley* field guide that I have carried around for years. It does not begin to do justice to the experience of standing open-mouthed behind the bird blinds watching the feeders attract flocks of Green Jays...their color, iridescence, the markings on their face, animation, calling to one another. It all makes me want to observe more and learn more.

Volunteering – I have chosen to volunteer at the SPI Birding, Nature Center & Alligator Sanctuary. I feel like I am welcoming people to share this adventure. I was excited and satisfied to be able to help visitors identify birds on my very first day.

And the joy of it is that everyone loves something different. What do you love?



Author (center) sharing the joy on her first day of volunteering with (L-R) Jake Reinbolt, Becky, Cristin, and Javi Gonzalez at SPI Birding Center