



The Sabal

November 2025
Volume 41, number 8

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Plant species page #s in the Sabal refer to:
“Plants of Deep South Texas” by A.Richardson & K.King (PDST).

Plants of Deep South Texas has been reprinted (without revisions).
It is also available as an ebook for Kindle.

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Submission of relevant articles and/or
photos are welcomed.

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NPP meeting topic/speaker:
Tues., November 25th, at 7 pm

“Life & Legacy of Robert Runyon”
presented by — Mike Heep

This month, we explore the life and legacy of **Robert Runyon**: a figure in South Texas history whose work still shapes our understanding of the region’s native flora.

In this presentation, **Mike Heep** will highlight:

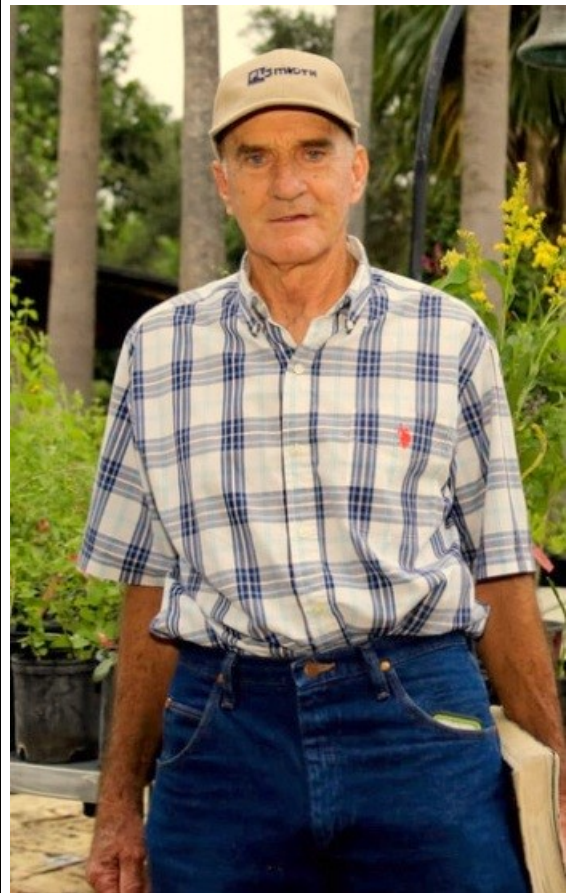
- A selection of plants associated with Robert Runyon’s collections and discoveries.
- Anecdotes and stories about Runyon and his botanical adventures Mike’s own insights gathered from decades of field experience and nursery work.

Expect a blend of South Texas history, botany, humor, and storytelling all centered on the plants that shaped Runyon’s legacy.

Mike Heep has been at the heart of native plant conservation in the Rio Grande Valley since the 1980s. Through his family-run nursery in Harlingen, he has grown and supplied countless native species that now thrive in parks, gardens, refuges, and restoration sites across South Texas.

With a background in **Botany, Horticulture, and Chemistry**, Mike blends scientific understanding with hands-on horticultural experience all delivered with the humor and down-to-earth storytelling he’s known for. His work has made him one of the Valley’s most trusted voices on native plants.

The meeting is at:
Valley Nature Center, 301 S Border, (Gibson Park), Weslaco.
956-969-2475



NPP Awards for 2025.

The NPP Awards Committee is very pleased to announce this year's recipients of our Scholarship and Native Plant Propagation Awards. These young candidates are outstanding, and the sentiments they share on their applications are worth sharing with our members.

We hope you will attend the November meeting to congratulate them on their achievements and goals, and to welcome each of them in person.

Josue Ayala, our Vice President, will be introducing each of them and summarizing the reasons each was chosen to receive an award.

We are also reaching out to all applicants, to offer them Handbooks, seeds Jann Miller has collected and packaged from species growing successfully in her yard, and NPP membership. We want to encourage each of our applicants to continue and expand their interest in native plants and to become more active in the Native Plant Project.

Our Scholarship recipient for 2025 is Robert Ezekiel Schmidt of Edinburg, TX.

Robert stands apart from other scholarship applicants in many ways. He is an Eagle Scout and one of the youngest certified Texas Master Naturalists in the state (South Texas Border Chapter).

His Eagle Scout project was designing, creating, and maintaining a "Native Serenity Garden" near the Meadows Subdivision in Edinburg. This project involved about 300 hours of his attention. Robert's parents are also Master Naturalists who have assisted in the native garden, which Robert's sister Katherine especially enjoys. The Serenity Garden of 30 native plant species has attracted over 200 documented animal species.

Robert has accumulated volunteer hours in city and state parks, in plant propagation and restoration, bird and butterfly counts and public education events.

As a sophomore at Texas A&M University in Kingsville, Robert is studying Range & Wildlife Management and doing well in his classes. He hopes to continue higher education in that field. Most recently, Robert has done summer field work in soil collection, contributing to control of invasive plant species in the Texas Hill Country.

Robert's talents go beyond guinea grass removal (at which he is well-experienced) to wildlife photography, some of which you can see at Edinburg World Birding Center. He is author of a fantasy book series called "Almost Uninteresting" which features strong nature and cultural themes, as well as a children's book about Tourette's syndrome, "I Can't Stop Squeaking." Each book is available on Amazon.

After graduating, Robert hopes to work in the field of native plant restoration and wildlife conservation, managing habitats to support biodiversity in different parts of the world, and especially in South Texas.

Below are examples of Robert's wildlife photography taken from his Facebook postings.



Extending our community across a border.

We have selected four applicants for Native Plant Propagation Grants.

One is **Daniel Eduardo Jaramillo-Ortiz**.

In this photo, he is conducting one of his many nature tours in his hometown of Matamoros, Tamps., MX.

Daniel Eduardo Jaramillo-Ortiz has expressed his goal to establish the first native plant nursery in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico. He is a self-taught and accomplished naturalist. NPP is proud to assist him in this effort. Many of us already follow Eduardo on Facebook, where we can view his many endeavors. He began educating about the local environment on Facebook in 2018. In 2019, he became the Administrator of the Facebook group “Arboles por Matamoros.” He owns “Conoce lo Nativo” (previously “Por Una Vida Mas Verde”) through which he cultivates a variety of native plants, making them available to individuals and for planting in public parks.

Eduardo has been a public accountant since graduating in 2020 from Tecnológico de Mexico Campus Matamoros.

He is currently 28 years old, with seven years experience in growing, studying and using native plants from northeast Mexico and South Texas. “I really enjoy transmitting all my knowledge to all the people in Matamoros and other cities around here through social media posts such as Facebook, youtube and tiktok, through native plant walks and ecological interpretation projects, going to undisturbed areas on my city. I actually propagate native plants in my backyard and plant them in urban public spaces to make patches of habitat for pollinators, birds and other incredible purposes.” Many of his south Texas Facebook friends are hopeful that we will meet Eduardo in person at our November meeting.



A recommendation letter for Eduardo’s application:

Dear friends: I am so excited and happy that our group includes one of the most inspiring people in our region. Yes, I’m referring to the young and talented Certified Public Accountant Daniel Ortiz <https://www.facebook.com/danny.ortizz/>, who is now the most visible leader of a new environmental movement. He enjoys sharing his vision and extensive knowledge of the native flora (and birds) of our region. As a content creator on social media, he has proven to be a great science communicator and botany enthusiast, helping to foster an environmental culture. From the group ARBOLES POR MATAMOROS (Trees for Matamoros), we hope that our “Botanical Accountant” continues to share the great love he clearly feels for nature. With enormous admiration, October 14, 2025, Tere Trevino, Group Administrator

<https://www.facebook.com/teresa.trevinorizo>



Here are a few examples of Eduardo’s photography posted on Facebook.



Angela Rojas will receive a 2025 Native Plant Propagation Award:

Angela Rojas has been involved with NPP since 2016, when she began working at Quinta Mazatlan. She served on our board, as Secretary, which is a tedious job and was certainly appreciated. She began to see native plants as a “fountain of youth—the elixir to maintaining youth and creating lifelong friendships.”

Since that time, Angela has become the mother of a beautiful daughter, who shares Angela’s love of nature. Angela is once again working at Quinta Mazatlan, where she has led a number of workshops, including Plant Propagation, Vines 101 and Intro to Native Plant Gardening. She also assists with McAllen’s “Tiny Forests” projects.

Angela states: “I’d love to grow (native plants) to give to people in my community. I’d also love to donate plants to NPP for any of their future planting projects.” She has experience with American Forests at Marinoff Nursery, has proven her ability to speak about plant propagation, has been an environmental educator, a park interpreter at Bentsen State Park, and is currently CUE Coordinator, working with John Brush at Quinta Mazatlan. John gives Angela the highest recommendation for this award.

Angela’s reasons for applying for NPP’s propagation grant are to have better access to soil, pots and a small shade structure. She hopes to grow several species which are not common in cultivation.

Angela’s goal for the future, once her daughter is a bit older, is to continue her education in graduate school.

Recommendation letter from John Brush:

“Please consider this my strong support of Angela Rojas to be a recipient of the Growing Grant to encourage more people to propagate our native plants of the Rio Grande Valley. Angela already has a wealth of knowledge about native plants in the region; she’s developed and delivered 10+ workshops and programs on native plant gardening on behalf of Quinta Mazatlan, along with writing educational blog posts on the subject.

I can only imagine if she were to receive the grant how many of our less-frequently propagated native plants she would grow, knowing her expertise on the subject.

As a native plant enthusiast, I want to see more people have the opportunity to receive monetary help getting started on their plant propagation journey.

We need more native plant growers in the RGV and Angela is a strong candidate to receive your Growing Grant.

All the best,

*John Brush
Urban Ecologist*



Ernesto Herrera is the recipient of a 2025 Native Plant Propagation award!

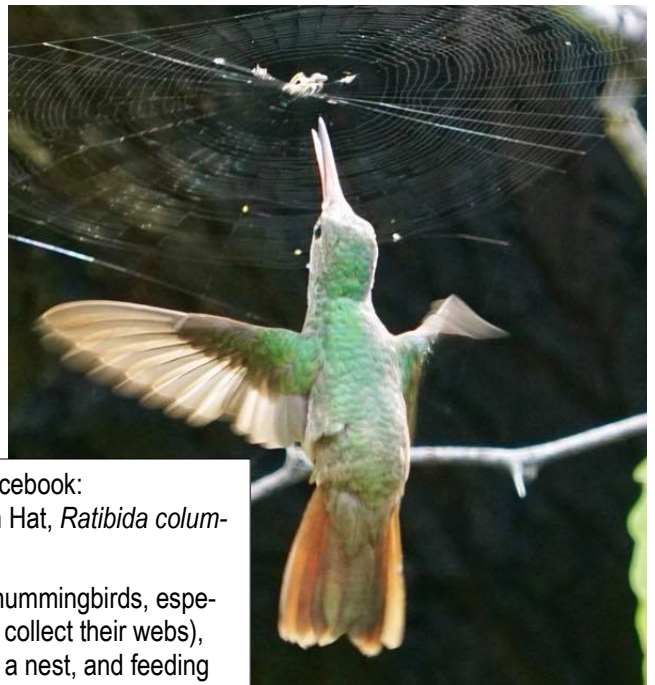
Ernest plans to build four propagation tables to grow plant bands for USFWS. It will be covered with a shade structure. His application included a spreadsheet of materials and costs, and has only asked for funds to cover his materials budget. He included detailed drawings of just what he will construct. Our Awards Committee is duly impressed by the details Ernest provided on each component he needs, the cost and quantity of each needed item, and where he will source them. There is no “fat” in his budget request.

Ernest began working at McAllen Nature Center after receiving a Bachelor’s degree in Biology from UTRGV Edinburg. He and his coworkers and volunteers transformed a previously-ignored park into a marvelous place to enjoy nature. He has also worked for Estero Llano Grande State Park and as Landhawk Consulting Lead Biologist is in charge of threatened and endangered species surveys.

Ernest relates: “My mentality nowadays is that the best way for us to help our wildlife in the RGV is to bring a small patch of native plants to everyone’s home. While we may never get back what we’ve lost, we can potentially help hundreds of species by providing them with food and shelter within our yards.

Ernest is currently the only plant expert on a team at TXDOT; he does his best to make sure that we can protect our native plants as much as possible throughout the state. “My hope is that, in the future, we will have lined our canals and drainage ditches with as many native plants as possible. This would create corridors for our wildlife, clean our water and slow down water during heavy rains.”

“My future goals are to continue helping with RGV plant and wildlife conservation. One of my major initiatives last year was to begin conversations with the City of Mission to allow residents to have native plant yards within the city without getting harassed by neighbors and code enforcement. This measure was just voted on and passed on October 28, 2025. After this, I will move on to the next city until we can potentially make all the cities in the RGV friendly toward people ... growing native plants in their yard.”



Photos posted by Ernest on Facebook:
Left: beetle feeding on Mexican Hat, *Ratibida columnaris*, PDST 121.

Right: You may be aware that hummingbirds, especially females, eat spiders (and collect their webs), mainly when breeding, building a nest, and feeding chicks. Ernest caught this hummer in the act.

NPP is proud to award a Native Plant Propagation award to **Lorna Heep!**

Lorna Heep requested this plant propagation award in order to use a unique propagation method: air-layering. She has a lifetime of experience with native plants, from working in Heep’s Native Nursery in many capacities, volunteering at Ramsey Nature Park from a very young age, and assisting with native plant sales at Harlingen’s Flower Show and the RGV Birding Festival. In recent years, Lorna has helped NPP with our children’s hands-on activities at the festival.

She is currently a 19-year-old student at UTRGV-Edinburg. During the summers of 2022 and 2023, Dr. David Laughlin provided an internship for Lorna at Texas A&M University Kingsville Citrus Center in Weslaco. She assisted in projects related to plant pathology, mycology and horticulture in laboratory, greenhouse and field settings and received glowing recommendations from Dr. Laughlin. Lorna valued the experience she gained in that setting with grafting and budding, of great use in propagating plants.

“I also volunteer on a regular basis with the Plant Ecophysiology Lab at UTRGV. My volunteer experience has given me a better understanding of plant sciences and fieldwork, and an increased appreciation of native species and ecosystems.”

Lorna intends to pursue and earn a degree in biology at UTRGV. “Currently, I am still investigating what career I should pursue once I am finished with my education. I’m drawn to professions that would allow me to contribute to habitat restoration or conservation of native habitats and flora, either through research in the laboratory, education, or with local environmental groups. Although I currently have my sights on becoming the next owner of my family’s nursery.”

“The Native Plant Project has already been a huge portion of my life, and receiving this grant would be a blessing that will allow me to continue doing what I am passionate about. I appreciate them for providing an opportunity to apply for the work that this organization does toward the efforts of promoting and preserving native plants within our communities.”

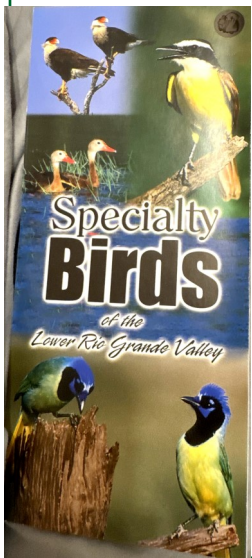
It is important to recognize the fine example of Lorna’s mom, Claire Heep, in organizing Heep’s Nursery and demonstrating the constant hard work and dedication required.



NPP at RGV Birding Festival: NPP’s birding festival booth resembled a forest understory of one gallon plants from Heep’s Native Nursery. Thanks to generous donations of larger shrubs grown by Billy Joe Snider, Jr. and Sue Griffin, we also had taller specimens on offer. As you can see by Trilby’s winter jacket, Harlingen Convention Center was extremely cold. Plants of Deep South Texas, newly-reprinted, was available with Ken King on-site to sign as co-author. He and Trilby were there everyday, and continued to restock plants as needed. Our Children’s Activity involved questions about LRGV Specialty Birds, with this beginning birding guide for each child who participated. Questions were designed for all levels, from a child just learning to identify colors, to those who recognize raptors. “Which birds eat fruits?” was easily answered, as several birds are shown perched in fruiting native trees.

Thanks to each of our NPP volunteers. Some worked behind-the-scenes preparing materials. Others braved the chill of the Convention Center Exhibit Hall!

- Josue Ayala
- Lisa Adam
- Drew Bennie
- Sue Griffin
- Vicky Guerra
- Lorna Heep
- Ken King
- Trilby King
- Christina Mild
- Jann Miller
- Rachel Nagy
- Barbara Peet
- Lizz Romero
- Janet Schofield
- Kathy Sheldon
- Billy Joe Snider, Jr.



Sponsors (Native Plant Nurseries)

LRGV Native Plant Sources

Heep's LRGV Native Plant Nursery

Owned and operated by Mike and Claire Heep

We grow plants suited to landscaping and revegetation in south Texas.

1714 S. Palm Court Drive, Harlingen, TX 78552
(956) 457-6834 <heep0311@yahoo.com>
Heep's Nursery is on Facebook



Perez Ranch Nursery
(Betty Perez)

12 miles north of La Joya, TX
(956) 587-2149

<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>

John Brush posted these photos and comments recently on Facebook:

"A little roadside naturalizing out in Zapata County. It joins the other 9 counties we've completed our 100 plant species goal in.

Loved seeing the little *Acmaeodera* beetles on the coneflowers." *Ratibida columnaris*, PDST 121.

Nursery/Landscaper/Educator: RGV Natives!

Prickly Pair RGV

Owners: John & Stephanie Brush

Native Plant Pickup or Delivery
In-Person or Virtual Consult for Landscape Design
Educational Programming

Contact at: <prickly.pair.rgv@gmail.com>
or use the contact form at [https://prickly-pair-rgv.com/]

Nurseries/Landscaper selling Natives & Exotics:

Oleander Nursery (Seth & Candi Welliver)

Follow their Facebook page for updates!

2421 S Conway Ave, Mission, TX 78572
Candi 956-569-2367.

<Oleandernursery@gmail.com>

Open 10am-5pm Sat.-Sun. By appointment on weekdays.

National Butterfly Center

Old Military Hwy/3333 Butterfly Pk Dr.

Mission, TX 78572

[http://www.nationalbutterflycenter.org]

Rancho Lomitas Nursery (Benito Trevino)

P.O. Box 442, Rio Grande City, TX 78582

(956) 486-2576 *By appt. only

Landscaping, Etc. Inc., Noel Villarreal

125 N. Tower Rd, Edinburg;

956-874-4267, 956-316-2599



NPP Board & General Meetings

are held at Valley Nature Center

(4th Tues. each month, except December & thru summer)

Brd Mtgs 6 pm — Speaker 7 pm

Upcoming meetings: No December mtg.

2026: Jan. 27, Feb. 24, March 24, April 28, May 26.

FROM: NPP; POB 2742; San Juan, TX 78589

The **Native Plant Project (NPP)** has no paid staff or facilities. NPP is supported entirely by memberships and contributions. Anyone interested in native plants is invited to join. Members receive 8 issues of **The Sabal** newsletter per year in which they are informed of all project activities and meetings.

Meetings are held at:

Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border, Weslaco, TX.

Native Plant Project Membership Application

NEW: Student \$5/yr. (high school or college)

Regular \$20/yr. Contributing \$45/yr

Life \$250 one time fee/person

"Awards" fund donation: _____

Please print:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

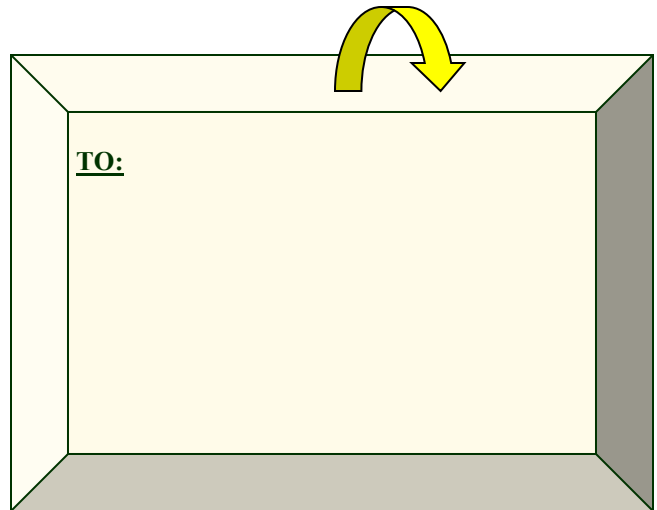
Phone _____ Zip _____ - _____

I'm choosing the "green option!"

Send my SABAL via .pdf file to:

Email: _____

Please mail this form with dues check payable to:
Native Plant Project, POB 2742, San Juan, TX 78589-7742



NPP meeting/speaker:
Tues., November 25th, at 7 pm
"Life & Legacy of Robert Runyon"
presented by — Mike Heep

NPP 2025 Scholarship &
Native Plant Propagation Awards will be
presented at this meeting!

The meeting is held at **Valley Nature Center**, 301 S Border,
(in Gibson Park), Weslaco. 956-969-2475

Feel free to bring a native plant for I.D. Native Plants are available
for a donation. **(Please be generous!)**

We encourage donations of plant pots, seeds, and
cuttings of native plants.



Plant Species Featured in this issue:

Justicia runyonii, *Ratibida columnaris*.

(In this issue we focus on Homo sapiens who protect native flora.)

Justicia runyonii, Runyon's Water Willow.
PDST 51.
Sometimes a textured hat provides excellent
background. Photo by Christina Mild, 2002.