

## **The Valley Connects with Japan**

At first glance, you may not see a connection between the Valley and Japan. But think about it. The Valley is known, among other things, for its birding and nature; Japan is known, among other things, as a nation of nature lovers.

It seemed like a good fit to South Texas Nature, the Valley-wide Chamber of Commerce coop that markets the region internationally to nature enthusiasts. And so we decided to test the waters. After all, we had made real progress in other international markets. We've seen a marked increase in visitors from the UK and have made real gains in the awareness of the Valley among both German and especially UK birders thanks to an aggressive program in those markets. So we joined other Texas city representatives in a sales mission to Japan.

For an initial venture into a brand new market, the results were surprisingly positive- and uncharacteristically immediate. We booked two tours on the spot and have serious and promising interest from two others. We also have two television programs and a travel book making plans to cover us. The two secured tour groups alone will bring an estimated \$34,000 return on investment.

In a way, perhaps we shouldn't have been too surprised. After all, Japan rates a high fifth for international travel to Texas, right after, in order, Mexico, Canada, the UK and Germany.

The success of the venture really does prove the fact that the Valley is a world-class destination for nature enthusiasts, and underscores the importance once again of protecting and enhancing the asset- our unique habitat- that brings us people and economic vitality.