



Coffee: Your Shopping Choices Can Help Birds!

Many Alaskan bird species, such as Wilson's warbler, Tennessee warbler, Hermit thrush, and Swainson's thrush, winter in the mountains of Latin America, where coffee is grown. They are looking for trees, bushes, insects and fresh water to survive.

Coffee is the second most traded commodity after oil. Its production affects vast areas of habitat in the tropics. You, the consumer, have the power to affect how that habitat is managed.

Market demand for specialty coffees is growing. Yet many small farms that produce coffee in a sustainable manner get no extra financial reward for their effort because it gets mixed with those from large-scale modern production farms.

What's the problem with "conventional" coffee? Modern mechanized production methods often require growing coffee in the open ("sun" coffee). Overstory trees are cut. Crops may be treated with pesticides, some of which are banned in the United States.

What is the difference between the different types of coffee certifications?

Organic: No pesticides used. This is usually better for birds, many who eat insects, and all are very sensitive to toxins. There are no specific requirements for preserving habitat,

such as canopy trees, but often organic farms will plant shade anyway because coffee plants grown in shade are often healthier.

Fair-trade. This insures that the farmers and workers get fair pay for their crop. Most of what consumers pay at the store goes to the traders, roasters, and other middlemen, not the producers of coffee beans.

Shade-grown. Means a minimum amount of canopy trees are left in a coffee plantation. Usually this creates better habitat for birds. Often the canopy trees provide other services, helping to preserve soil quality.

Bird-friendly (Smithsonian) certified. This is the ultimate "certified" coffee. Farms are inspected for the above standards and must specifically provide bird habitat. In addition to being free of harmful pesticides and providing a canopy for the birds, other measures to protect watersheds, such as setbacks from streams, are implemented. For more info see:

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/coffee/>

Buying any of the above is likely better for bird conservation than un-certified coffee. Often, the programs go hand in hand.

Where can I buy more sustainably grown coffee? It's not always easy to find. **Ask at your local grocer or favorite coffee shop.**

Some brands/vendors that offer shade grown and/or organic coffee in Southeast Alaska include: Raven's Brew (at local grocers), San Francisco Bay Gourmet Coffees (at Costco) and Sentinel Coffee (a roastery). Look for bird friendly coffee in Fred Meyer; it may be in the

bulk/healthfood section (not the normal coffee area)

Online vendors of bird friendly coffee:

<http://www.environmentamericas.org/shop/> **And look for "coffee" tab. OR** <http://www.thanksgivingcoffee.com/> **and search for keyword "songbird"**

Don't want to type in all these long links? This article will be posted at JAS website. Search online for Juneau Audubon Society. Text and photos by Gwen Baluss.



This Swainson's thrush was using a shade coffee farm in Chiapas, Mexico.



A mist net for studying birds in a shade coffee farm, Mexico, part of Smithsonian's quest to learn what birds seek.