

Coffee and Birds

Many Alaskan birds, such as Tennessee Warbler and Swainson's thrush, winter in the mountains of Latin America. They are looking for trees, bushes, insects and fresh water to survive. Sometimes, they find themselves in a coffee farm.

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?

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 service like maintaining soil quality.

Organic: No pesticides used. This is usually better for birds, who are very sensitive to toxins. There are no requirements for preserving canopy trees, but often organic farms will plant shade anyway because

coffee plants grown in shade are often healthier.

Bird-friendly (Smithsonian) certified. This is the ultimate "certified" coffee. Farms must specifically provide multi-tiered bird habitat and measures to protect watersheds. Buying any of the above is likely better for bird conservation than un-certified coffee. Often, the programs go hand in hand.



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

Where can we buy more sustainably grown coffee?

Ask at your grocer or coffee shop so coffee lovers can have more options.

Some brands/vendors that offer shade grown and/or organic coffee in Southeast Alaska include: Raven's Brew (at Safeway), San Francisco Bay Gourmet Coffees (at Costco), Sentinel Coffee (a Gustavus roastery) and Javatopia (at Fred Meyer, health food aisle).

Are these coffees tasty? Most are considered gourmet, so why not give them a try? Makes a great gift for birders too!

Some online vendors:

Environment for the Americas
<http://www.environmentamericas.org/shop/>

Thanksgiving Coffee
<http://www.thanksgivingcoffee.com/>
keyword "songbird"

Sentinel Coffee
<https://sentinel-coffee.myshopify.com/collections/frontpage/products/bird-friendly-blend-organic-bird-friendly-certified-dark-roast>

For more information, see Smithsonian
<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/bird-friendly-coffee>



Coffee plants and a mist net for studying birds in a shade coffee farm, Mexico, part of Smithsonian's bird studies there.



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Text and photos by Gwen Baluss for JAS