



If you drink coffee and care about the welfare of songbirds, you should be drinking Bird-Friendly coffee. In her excellent article in the February 2013 issue of Bird Watching magazine, “The True Cost of Coffee”, Supervisor of Avian Research at the Rouge River Bird Observatory of the University of Michigan, Julie Craves writes: “I cannot state it any plainer than this: If you are buying inexpensive grocery store or fast-food coffee, you are contributing to the destruction of bird habitat and the decline of migratory songbirds. It is one of the worst things you can do for the environment on a daily basis – and one of the easiest things for you to change.” So, if this description fits you, please read on.

Most commercial coffees available today are known as “sun coffees”. These coffees were developed for high yields and low production costs with no consideration of ecological impact. They are grown on large farms in full sun on land that has been cleared of native vegetation, is heavily fertilized, and is subjected to pesticides and herbicides. This is most likely what you are drinking every day as your morning pick-me-up. If you think buying a name

# Why You Should Drink Bird Friendly Coffee

By Phil & Jan Fowler, Mecklenburg Audubon Society (July 2020)

brand coffee is safe, here are some of the most popular brands which are “sun coffees”: Nescafe, Taster’s Choice, Folgers, Millstone, Dunkin’ Donuts, Maxwell House, Sanka, and Chase & Sanborn. This list is not comprehensive, so do not think if your favorite brand is not listed that you are in the clear.

Nearly all of our migrating songbirds are negatively affected by “sun coffee” production. All such farms are nearly devoid of animal life, especially birds. By contrast, as Julie Craves found in her bird banding projects in Central and South America, and noted author Scott Weidensaul, found in his surveys, Bird-Friendly coffee farms (shade grown using organic practices) are biologically diverse and “dripping” with song birds.

By now you want to be part of the solution, not the problem, but how do you know the difference? Many coffees will be labeled shade grown, which sounds good, but there is no agreed-upon or legal definition of shade grown. Shade grown can mean anything from the rustic method of planting coffee in existing forests of native trees to growing coffee in a large cleared field “shaded” by a few non-native eucalyptus trees. The most reliable way to know is to look for certification. The most common certifications are explained in the sidebar.

Bird-Friendly coffee is a “specialty coffee” and when you find it, it will cost more than “standard” name brand coffee. Bird-Friendly coffee farming practices necessarily have lower yields because other plants, which are providing the shade for the coffee and habitat for songbirds, take up space. Organic farming practices require more labor to keep down weeds and pests than simply spraying

## Bird-Friendly



This is the only true “shade grown” certification. This certification was developed by ecologists at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and has the strictest habitat requirements of any coffee certification. Bird-Friendly coffee not only has to be shade grown, using rustic practices, it also has to be organic. Only coffee certified by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center can be called Bird-Friendly. Dozens of migratory songbird species take refuge in heavily shaded coffee farms, including species that have declined steeply over the past decades such as Baltimore Oriole, Canada Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Olive-sided Flycatcher.

## Organic



To be certified organic in the United States, coffee must be produced under standards established by the Department of Agriculture, even if it is grown in another country.

## Rainforest Alliance



The Rainforest Alliance is a non-profit organization that promotes sustainable agriculture and its certification program covers many crops, including coffee. Neither shade management nor organic farming is required. It is not as strict as Bird-Friendly, but helpful in areas where lots of shade is not possible and for those farms which cannot meet all organic requirements. I know Caribou Coffee uses Rainforest Alliance certified coffee.

## Fair Trade



This certification is primarily concerned with lessening poverty among coffee farmers and improving their overall standard of living. While this is certainly a worthwhile cause, it also does not address how the coffee is grown and does not help the birds.

Obviously, finding any of these certifications on coffee makes it a better choice than mass-produced “sun coffee”. However, the Smithsonian Bird-Friendly certification is the only one, which guarantees sustainably grown coffee and improved bird habitat.

with herbicides and pesticides. Bird-Friendly coffee needs to cost more not only to cover the inherently higher expense of growing the coffee, but also to encourage more farmers to adopt sustainable practices and allow those farmers already using sustainable practices to stay in business. On the positive side, economics shows that increased demand in a market where consumers are willing to pay more will inevitably lead to more supply and possibly lower prices.

The bottom line on Bird-Friendly coffee is that it costs more, tastes better, is better for you and the environment, and should be the only choice for coffee drinkers who are also serious about conservation and increasing migratory bird populations.

Mecklenburg Audubon Society believes in the conservation of the wintering grounds of our

songbirds and orders Bird-Friendly Birds & Beans coffee for sale. Birds & Beans is the only company that sells exclusively Bird Friendly coffee. Other companies sell “sun coffee” and one or two Bird-Friendly coffees. Also, more than 10% of Birds & Beans profits go to their conservation partners (including The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, sanctuaries, and preserves).

We just hope you will help the birds by giving it a try and see how tasty and easy conservation-minded coffee can be.

Thanks for taking time to read and consider your impact on the welfare of migrating birds.

**Note:** this article owes a great debt to Julie Craves and Scott Weidensaul for information and inspiration.



## How to Order

You may order this great coffee from the Birds & Beans website with free shipping until further notice by following this process:

1. Go to [www.birdsandbeans.com](http://www.birdsandbeans.com)
2. Select your coffee,
3. Enter code MASNIC in Gift or Discount Code box at order summary checkout,
4. Complete your order and receive free shipping!

Your order will be delivered to your home for you to enjoy.

If you have any questions, contact Jan Fowler [[janmfowler@gmail.com](mailto:janmfowler@gmail.com)]