



Coffee & Conservation

Are your beans for the birds?



FEATURED CONTENT

- Why birds need shade coffee farms
- Pesticides used on coffee farms
- What is 'shade-grown' coffee?
- How much eco-friendly coffee do big companies buy?
- When birders drink Folgers
- All about popular coffee brands

CATEGORIES

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 - Smithsonian Bird-Friendly
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 - Nestlé/Nespresso
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- Retail and specialty roasters
 - Caribou Coffee
 - Keurig Green Mountain
 - Starbucks

RECENTLY UPDATED

- Dunkin Donuts coffee: still not eco-friendly **March 8, 2021**
- Who owns what? **March 8, 2021**
- Eco-certified coffee: How much is there? **March 7, 2021**
- Starbucks CAFÉ Practices **March 6, 2021**
- Corporate coffee: How much is eco-certified? **March 6, 2021**



Know Your Coffee Birds: Red Siskin

by JULIE CRAVES on DECEMBER 31, 2020



Male Red Siskin. Photo by Linda De Volder under a Creative Commons license.

Here's an entry in the occasional [Know Your Coffee Bird](#) series, which profiles birds that utilize shade coffee farms. This post is about a species people might not immediately connect with coffee. It is a finch, related to more familiar goldfinches (both American and European), and like them primarily eats seeds and favors a variety of open or semi-open habitats. This is in contrast to the insect- and fruit-eating birds inhabiting tropical forests that we tend to associate with coffee farms. Let's talk about the endangered [Red Siskin](#) (*Spinus* [formerly *Carduelis*] *cucullatus*).

The Red Siskin never had a large range, being primarily found along the northern coast of Venezuela, just edging into Colombia. Once common, populations are now [critically fragmented across this area](#) and it is estimated that somewhere between 1500 to 7000 birds (at best) remain in the wild; this includes a relatively recent location found in Guyana. Red Siskins are considered so iconic in Venezuela that they are depicted on the country's currency. Streets, a park, and even the country's Little League team is named for them ("cardenalito" in Spanish).

Habitat loss has played a role in the decline of the Red Siskin, but unsustainable trapping for the cage bird trade is a major reason for the near-disappearance of this species. Males are prized for their bright coloration (females are duller) and their ability to mate with the common canary, introducing their red coloration to future generations of canaries. Because Red Siskins can be harder to raise in captivity, wild birds are continually captured to maintain the red genes in canaries — which is actually unnecessary from a genetic standpoint. Although trapping in Venezuela has been illegal for decades, the increasing rarity of these birds, the [poverty-inducing economic crisis](#) and political upheaval in Venezuela combine to make illegal trade in the birds lucrative for both greedy poachers and desperate citizens.

In 2015, the [Red Siskin Initiative](#) was established among many partner organizations to address the precipitous declines. Strategies include research, captive colonies with the aim to breed siskins for reintroduction, reducing overexploitation, and public education. An important component of this initiative is habitat preservation and income security through coffee farming.



Venezuela once had a thriving coffee industry which was eclipsed by the oil economy and grew out of favor due to government price controls that make coffee farming unprofitable and unsustainable. However, [Bird-Friendly](#) coffee certification (which requires organic certification) qualifies the coffee as gourmet, exempt from the price controls, and allows it to be sold at a premium. In addition to organic farming methods, [Bird-Friendly certification has requirements](#) regarding shade cover and composition, native tree diversity, and other criteria that provide habitat for birds, including Red Siskins. Partners also provide technical assistance and help producers with capacity-building.

In 2019, nearly 40 farms occupying 165 ha, members of the Asociación Civil de Productores Agroforestales–Piedra de Cachimbo y Florida (ACAFLO), [obtained organic certification, with 13 also gaining Bird-Friendly certification](#). The goal is to expand the certified production area to 400 ha by the end of 2021. Venezuela exports little or no coffee these days, and the [situation is dire](#) there. I really hope for the success of this project, and look forward to being able to purchase this coffee to support this great conservation initiative. The establishment of Bird-Friendly certified coffee farms will provide a sustainable livelihood for farmers and preserve habitat for Red Siskins and many other bird and wildlife species.

The home brewers below are certified by the SCA to make coffee to high standards - read more here.

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- Quick guide to coffee certifications
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- Coffee growing in Australia
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- Pesticides used on coffee farms, part 3: Common pesticides
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- The Coffee Crisis
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- Trader Joe's coffee
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- What is shade-grown coffee?
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Rainforest Alliance certification standards

Rainforest Alliance certified farms look up

Why Birds Are Crazy for Shade Coffee

Birds that use coffee plantations

Shade certification issues

The Case of the Disappearing Warbler

ARCHIVES

Archives



Pair of Red Siskins. From a plate in Bird Notes, scanned by the Biodiversity Heritage Library.

More reading:

- ▶ [Saving Red Gold: The International Effort to Rescue Red Siskins \(American Bird Conservancy\)](#)
- ▶ [Coffee and Chocolate Could Help Preserve Endangered Birds in Venezuela \(Smithsonian Magazine\)](#)
- ▶ [The Red Canary \(Tim Birkhead\)](#)
- ▶ [Venezuela: Coffee Annual \(2020, USDA\)](#)
- ▶ [From Red Siskin Science, New Paths and Opportunities in Guyana \(Smithsonian\)](#)

Revised on March 4, 2021

Posted in BIRDS AND OTHER BIODIVERSITY,KNOW YOUR COFFEE BIRDS SERIES

PREVIOUS POST: Finding Bird-Friendly coffee – now easier

NEXT POST: Birders still in the dark about shaded Bird-Friendly coffee

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Integrated Open Canopy: a land sharing strategy for coffee
Coffee berry borer update
New Rainforest Alliance criteria for shade
Rainforest Alliance certified coffee: useless to evaluate shade-grown conditions
Sips
Rainforest Alliance and UTZ to merge

RECOMMENDED ROASTERS (ROTATING)

Allegro Coffee
Johnson Brothers
Equator Coffees & Teas
Birds and Beans (US)
Thanksgiving Coffee
Wonderstate Coffee
PT's Coffee Co.
Golden Valley Farms
Birds and Beans (Canada)
Wood Warbler Coffee
Sweet Marias (green)
Caffe Ibis

COFFEE & CONSERVATION ELSEWHERE

C&C is featured or used a resource at the following sites:
On Public Radio International's "The World"
The True Cost of Coffee: BirdWatching Mag
E, The Environmental Magazine article
Stanford [University] Magazine
BirdScope, Cornell Lab of Ornithology
HowStuffWorks
Nature Blog Network
Philly Inquirer Green Space
Cornell's All About Birds