

Bird Diversity on Coffee Farms in Central Colombia

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SUMMARY

Coffee farming on the Andean foothills in central Colombia is intensive and much of it is under reduced shade or full sun conditions. Over the last decade various authors and institutes have suggested that sun coffee is little more than a biological desert – drawing attention especially to impoverished bird life – and that coffee farmers should be encouraged to reintroduce shade trees under one of a number of schemes in return for a premium.

This study, part of a Darwin Initiative project funded by the UK government, aimed to objectively study bird diversity and abundance on 80 farms in two municipalities of the central cordillera of Andean Colombia: a) smallholder coffee farmers (Manizales) and b) larger plantations (Palestina), both in the Department of Caldas. Altitude range was between 1300 and 1700 m above sea level, covering biomes classified as tropical lower montane and premontane rain forest (the Holdridge classification).

Abundance and species of birds were counted along walked transects made through the farms. The habitats in which the birds were observed were also recorded, these included: coffee, bamboo groves, gardens, uncultivated (weedy ground), hedgerows, other crops and buildings. A record was made of plant species encountered.

100 species of bird were recorded belonging to 30 families. Most common were Tryrannidae (flycatchers), Thraupinae (tanagers) and Parulinae (wood warblers). Also present were Trochilidae (hummingbirds) and Emberizinae (New World sparrows). Frugivorous families were rather poorly represented. Eleven of the species were intercontinental migrants.

There were only fairly small differences in composition of species between the small farms and the larger estates (66 species in common); abundance was generally higher on the estates. No CITES-listed endangered species were observed and neither were any species in the ‘highly vulnerable’ category.

The results are discussed in relation to potential ways to further enhance and protect these bird populations and how to involve farmers in this task.