



GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing 26 September 2011

Keeping It "Green"

Lessons from the MBS and beyond



Last week, I returned from the highly successful and impressive Midwest Birding Symposium (MBS) held at Lakeside, Ohio. Participants may have been delighted over the quality of the speakers, the array of vendors, the skill of the field-trip leaders, and the smooth cooperation between the hosting organizations (*Bird Watcher's Digest*, the Ohio Ornithological Society, and the Lakeside Association).

While I was impressed by all these factors, I was particularly taken with the special efforts made by the organizers to make the [Midwest Birding Symposium](#) as "green" as possible. Some of these elements were what we have come to expect from most birding-and-nature events, while others were breakthrough innovations. These sorts of efforts from MBS and elsewhere can help to set a new standard for future birding and nature festivals, conferences, conventions, and even accommodate the needs of far-reaching scenic byways and birding trails. They include the following features I've observed from localities and events around the country:

- The availability of can, glass, plastic, and paper recycling bins is almost commonplace now. This wasn't always so.
- As increasing familiarity and trust of secure on-line registration and payment for festivals - and other activities - grow, so does the parallel reduction of paper. (Almost 90 percent of the registrants at the MBS, for example, registered online.)
- The use of re-fillable water-bottles and hot-liquid travel-cups is growing. Styrofoam avoidance is virtually expected now. And we certainly don't need to leave behind mountains of clear plastic water-bottles, even when they are getting recycled!
- Hotels, especially at sites where festivals and conferences are held and increasingly along scenic byways and birding trails, are adopting their own modest programs for conserving water, paper, and energy.
- Carpooling is often favored, especially at events where the field trips do not involve large buses.

Three additional outstanding innovations of a green nature - recycling optics and other field equipment, carbon offset mitigation, and bird-compatible shade-grown coffee - are described below.

Recycling Optics and More:

It is always encouraging to see a birding festival, conference, or club embrace the

recycling of used-but-still-highly-functional optics. This "recycling" usually means collecting and sending binoculars and spotting scopes (sometimes along with books, cameras, and laptops) to our counterparts in Latin America and the Caribbean. These counterparts there, struggling men and women, often lack the most basic equipment, such as binoculars and field guides. When good equipment is sent to educators, guides, conservationists, and researchers in the Neotropics, the equipment goes to those responsible for protecting our shared resource, the birds. These birds are often migratory species that travel across the Americas on an annual basis, species that need increased protection.

There are a few fine projects which are outstanding in this regard. Over the years, Birders' Exchange, a project of the American Birding Association, has become the primary vehicle for this equipment transfer. Indeed,

[Birders' Exchange](#) has set the standard.

There are others, like [Optics for the Tropics](#) and local projects run by individual bird clubs, that also do a fine job in this area. Recently, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, in cooperation with Cornell University Press and major funders, sent over [10,000 Cuban field guides](#) (in Spanish) to schools, libraries, and universities across that Caribbean island.



Opportunities in this area abound, as generous optics companies and thoughtful publishers have often cooperated in getting optics, books, and other equipment to where they are desperately needed.

A Birding Carbon Offset:

Efforts have recently been launched to encourage birders to offset birding-related carbon emissions, those that come from birding, and link a proposed mitigation funding to secure quality bird habitat, often in the locality of the event or trip in question.



A couple of these have been tried in the recent past, including at the 2010 Biggest Week in American Birding in northwest Ohio and at last month's Tucson Bird and Wildlife Festival.

At the MBS, a new [Carbon Offset Bird Project](#) (COBP) was tried, having birders measure their birding "carbon footprint" and invest collectively the offset proceeds locally to help preserve wetland habitat a mere three miles from Lakeside, where the MBS took place. The COBP effort was well received and may serve as a model for other events in the future.

Made in the Shade



If the overwhelming majority of these events are embracing the recycling of cans, paper, and plastic, if they favor electronic registration, if many are moving toward the use of portable bottles and travel cups for, respectively, water-refills and hot drinks, one cannot say the same about the use of bird-compatible coffee. Far too few birding festivals and conferences today emphasize shade-grown and bird-compatible coffee, integrated into their activities. Some do, but certainly not enough of them.

The arguments that these coffees are too difficult to acquire or are far too expensive might have had some validity in the past, but they are weak excuses today.

Shade-grown coffee in Latin America and the Caribbean plays a key role in the conservation of migratory birds, species which find a sanctuary in the forest-like environment of traditional shade-coffee growth. In the struggle against "technified" non-shade coffee, North American drinkers can make a difference by choosing coffee coming from those farms, plantations, and co-operatives that also harbor warblers, thrushes, vireos, tanagers, and other birds in the Neotropics.

Like our birding foremothers of the late 1900s who encouraged an informed consumer choice in the struggle against the deadly feather-trade, we today can choose to favor coffee that does not lead to habitat and bird destruction but leads to habitat and bird security.

Words to Consider:



"We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well - for we will not fight to save what we do not love."

- Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002)

For More Information:

Besides using the links provided above to find out more on the related subjects, you can contact me on avitourism, festivals, and presentations. You may be interested in simply greening your festival, conference, event, or byway-trail, or recycling equipment to our counterparts in the American Neotropics, or including carbon offsets for birding, and/or promoting shade-grown bird-compatible coffee. You can reach me at the e-mail and P.O. Box addresses below.