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SHADE-GROWN COFFEE IN THE PARK

October 29, 2014 · by Jonathan Silver · in Consumer Choices

One of the greatest barriers to performing ethical actions is that we live in a global community, where the effects of what we do often take place thousands and thousands of kilometers away, far beyond the reach of our senses. As a result, there often exists an 'experiential' or 'phenomenal' gap between our actions and the people, animals, and places affected by them.

Without directly experiencing those who are affected by what we do, it can be hard to change our habits, even if we have some idea that we're causing harm abroad. That's because firsthand experience affords an understanding of the world around us that's unmatched by anything we can read or be told (see [this earlier post](#) to learn more). More specifically, immediate experience helps us forge an understanding that is non-verbal, emotional, and personal.

I think that some of the world's greatest problems (and some of the smallest ones, too) can be lessened or eliminated by closing the corresponding experiential gap—by seeing for ourselves the persons, animals, and/or places that are harmed by our actions.

Let me tell you about how I'm working to close one of these gaps; the gap between the coffee we drink and the rainforests it harms.



I started a project called 'Coffee in the Park', where I invite Torontonians park-goers to sit down for a cup of shade-grown or bird friendly coffee and learn why these options are better than sun-grown coffee.

The difference between sun-grown and shade-grown coffee is this: **sun-grown coffee** grows much quicker and offers a higher yield than shade-grown coffee. Unfortunately, sun-grown coffee needs full sunlight, so rainforests are being clear-cut for this crop. Deforestation is a serious issue for many reasons, one being that it destroys vital chimpanzee habitat.

Shade-grown coffee, as the name implies, does not require clear-cutting because it grows *within* the rainforest, underneath its shaded canopy, making it the more sustainable option. **Bird-friendly coffee** is shade-grown coffee that has been additionally certified because it protects rainforests in a way that promotes healthy bird habitat.

The goal of the project, other than spreading the word about ethically grown coffee, is to help participants to bridge the experiential gap between their coffee drinking habits and the places harmed by those habits, which, for most participants, exist beyond their



<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migr>

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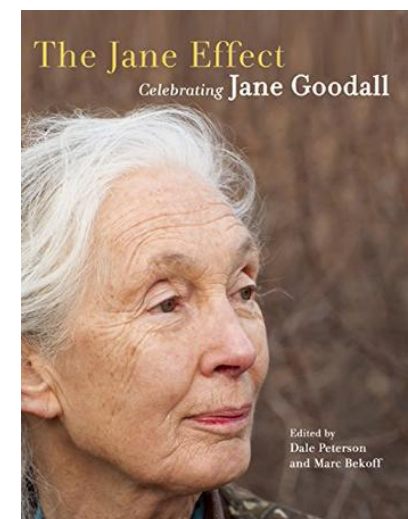
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senses.

To experience the rainforest without actually going there, I help participants translate their personal understanding of the park where they are sipping their coffee to the place this coffee comes from. Since participants already care for the park where they are sitting — they care for its trees, biodiversity, abundant shade, animal sounds, fresh air, and how good all this makes them feel — what's next is imagining that rainforests at risk from sun-grown coffee are places much like this park.



Photo taken by Mike Stulberg (<http://cargocollective.com/mikestulberg>)

Interestingly, Torontonians' experiential connection to the rainforest isn't just imaginary. Some birds seen in Toronto, like the Canada Warbler (image below), migrate to South America to escape winter here and stay in our parks during their journey. **So drinking sun-grown coffee impacts a forested place that participants can see with their own eyes;** the more ethical coffee they drink, the more Canada Warblers and other migratory birds they can expect to see in city.



Photo from: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilsonia_\(bird\)#mediaview:File:Wilsonia.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilsonia_(bird)#mediaview:File:Wilsonia.jpg)

Sun-grown coffee isn't the only threat to the rainforest. Coca, palm, and soybean are just a few other crops that cut away our precious rainforests. So making good consumer choices isn't just about buying sustainable coffee, it's about doing the best we can to make sure all our tropical products are sustainably sourced.

By making better consumer choices we get more birds in the city, which is great in itself and as an indicator that other rainforest animals like chimpanzees are being positively impacted.

Coffee in the Park will be brewing again on November 8th, 2014, from 10am-3pm at Dufferin Grove Park (south east corner, near the playground). Come see for yourself!

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