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# Calling all birders: A new study is seeking participants in the Southeast U.S. this summer



Sustainable Forestry Initiative  
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© Birders take part in a bird walk - by Tech. Sgt. Ted Nichols, via Wikimedia Commons

Birds add beauty to our lives, interesting behavior to observe, and are prime indicators of how well we are taking care of our planet.

—Donna McCarty, Birdathon chair, [Amos W. Butler Audubon Society](#)

Though it sounds like a technical term more suited for computer programming, avicaching is actually a growing practice that encourages birders to collect and share their data from bird-watching through an internationally known phone app. This practice of citizen science began about a decade ago with [eBird](#), a project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, as a way to fill in the data gaps from underrepresented habitats.



© Prairie warblers are commonly found in the Eastern United States - from Wikimedia Commons

Avicaching requires taking the road less-traveled, oftentimes in managed forests or private property, to not only hear and identity birds, but to also track their location and wellbeing. Why the need for off-road trekking? “Roadside bias” is a common drawback when mapping birds’ habitats from strictly a busy main road or highway. For instance, bobwhites prefer relatively open or young forests with just the beginnings of regrowth, while Swainson’s Warblers prefer a dense canopy forest with plenty of undergrowth. Tracking these species isn’t so easy from the comforts of one’s own car or parking lot.

To try and fill in these data gaps, the [Sustainable Forestry Initiative](#) (SFI) has joined forces with [American Bird Conservancy](#) to [collect statistics on birds](#) in the Southeast United States to take a closer look at certain forest habitats this summer. These working forests, located in Alabama and North Carolina, are all SFI-certified, meaning the lands meet a high standard for forest management, including practices to protect water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and species at risk. For three weeks this summer, birders are encouraged to collect raw data about these managed forests and its feathered inhabitants.

Why is tracking and identifying the homes of American birds so important? Because the collected data can inform both private companies and conservationists how certain terrains, managed forests in this case, are faring. “We’ve been tracking declines in even common [bird] species,” notes Emily Jo Williams, Vice President of the Migratory Birds & Habitats division of American Bird Conservancy. “But we still have time to make changes and maintain better bird habitats.”

“Forestlands managed to the SFI Program Standards provide a unique opportunity for collaboration at a large scale to address habitat needs for species at risk,” added Paul Trianosky, Chief Conservation Officer at SFI. “Hopefully we can help reverse the trend of these declining bird populations.”

To learn more about bird conservation research, SFI conservation grants, and the importance of birds to the environment, visit [sfiprogram.org](#).



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