



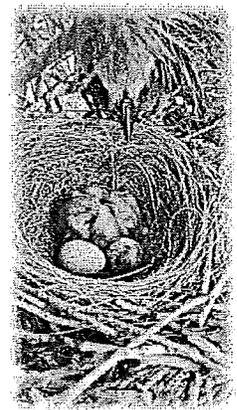
The Florida Scrub-Jay

CHARACTERISTICS

The Florida Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) is a 12-inch crestless jay, totally lacking the white-tipped wing and tail feathers and black barring of the much more common and widespread Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*). They are endemic to Florida and found nowhere else on the planet.

Florida Scrub-Jays are sedentary, permanently territorial, and permanently monogamous, cooperatively breeding birds that can live up to 15 years (Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1984, 1996). Group sizes range from simple pairs to extended families of up to eight individuals. Each group typically contains a single mated pair plus offspring from one or more preceding breeding seasons. Reproductively mature "helpers" may remain on their natal territories for up to several years and assist their parents in defending the territory, surveying for predators via "sentinel" behavior, and feeding nestlings and fledglings.

Group members spend virtually every minute of their lives within their oak scrub habitat, often foraging on or near the ground or perched on high, exposed perches. Their optimal habitat always contains significant areas of bare sand, within which they cache thousands of acorns each fall. Nesting takes place from late February through early June, with a peak in April and May. Nests are placed in dense shrubs (most often in scrub oaks), usually about one meter above ground, and typically located at the edge of an oak thicket near an open area. Clutch size is 2 to 5, and fledgling brood sizes vary from 1 to 4. Juveniles are brown-headed and remain dependent on parents and older group members for food and protection until mid-summer. They molt into essentially adult plumage during the early fall.



From a conservation standpoint, an important feature of the Florida Scrub-Jay is that its territories are relatively large compared to the home ranges of other rare and threatened plants and animals. Therefore, this jay represents a classic "*umbrella*" species: ***protecting scrub habitat in sufficient area to secure a local population and serves to protect virtually all the other plants and animals that share its ecosystem.***

HABITAT

For Florida Scrub-Jays, sand pine scrub and scrubby flatwoods are the **vital habitats** and are essential to several other rare species as well (e.g., gopher tortoise, eastern indigo snake, gopher frog, Florida mouse, and Florida coontie). Sand pine scrub, a habitat of low growing oaks and scattered sand pines, is considered the "***most distinct habitat in Florida and maybe one of the rarest habitats in North America.***"



Florida Scrub-Jays have very specific habitat requirements, as summarized extensively in several publications (Woolfenden 1978, Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1984, 1996, Fitzpatrick et al. 1991, Breininger and Morris 1982, Breininger et al. 1995, 1998, 2006, Breininger and Carter 2003). All these studies conclude that the species resides and reproduces successfully only in the presence of low-growing xeric oak scrub, a plant community restricted to well-drained sandy soils.

All impacts of unbalanced and fragmented development have a negative effect on the Florida Scrub-Jay. In the proximity of residential and commercial development, (1) adult and juvenile mortality are elevated, (2) annual reproductive success of breeding pairs is reduced, (3) overall population size declines both locally and regionally, and (4) the capacity for dispersers to move among potential habitat patches is reduced,



Because Florida Scrub-Jays are habitat specialists their presence and population size in a local area are determined, first and foremost, by the presence and total acreage of existing oak scrub habitat. Each breeding pair or family group typically requires 4 to 10 hectares (10 to 25 acres) of scrub habitat. As housing density increases and/or commercial development displaces scrub, the total area of habitat available for jays' declines. The net effect of any loss of scrub habitat, no matter how small the acreage, reduces the regional population of Florida Scrub-Jays.

As housing density increases and/or commercial development displaces scrub regionally, patches of scrub are reduced to smaller and smaller "islands" separated from one another by larger and larger areas of unsuitable habitat. **Fragmentation of scrub patches is extremely detrimental to Florida Scrub-Jay populations**, for many reasons. The more fragmented an area of scrub becomes, (1) the more each patch of scrub tends to lose its small population of jays simply by chance; (2) the more difficult it becomes for dispersing jays to recolonize after a local extirpation; (3) the less frequently each patch of scrub burns; and (4) the more likely each patch of scrub is to be influenced by the surrounding matrix of non-scrub habitat (edge effects). The effect of fragmentation is to accelerate the regional extirpation of Florida Scrub-Jays through an accumulation of local extirpations.

THE FLORIDA SCRUB-JAY NEEDS YOU:

Efforts to protect The Florida Scrub-Jay in Florida through various sources are underway **BUT ARE NOT ENOUGH!**

- State and Local Governments
- Conservation
- Habitat Restoration
- Land Management
- Education
- Special Events and Programs
- Campaigns
- Private Landowners
- Florida Scrub Jay Products



***Get involved and join the effort in protecting this
one-of-a-kind species!***

(Information gathered from various sources)

Save Our Florida Scrub Jays-October 2021