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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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## Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata*

The Blue Jay, one of Florida's most familiar birds, is attracted to suburban bird-feeders. However, it has a reputation as a raucous, aggressive bully, who robs other birds' nests.

The Blue Jay is a resident in much of the eastern two-thirds of the United States and Canada. In Florida the Blue Jay is a permanent resident which is becoming less common in the extreme southern portions of the state.

**Habitat.** In Florida, the Blue Jay is found in a wide variety of habitats other than the populated areas where they are so well known, including agricultural environments, hardwood swamps, hammocks, pine flatwoods, mixed forests, and sandhills. Human activities have benefitted the Blue Jay by creating more woodland edge, and it has successfully adapted to suburban areas. It is less common in pine plantations. Preferred foods are acorns and other seeds or nuts. At feeders they first select the sunflower seeds from a birdseed mixture. The Blue Jay also takes small animal prey, such as insects, lizards, toads, rodents, bird eggs, and nestlings.



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The bulky nest is placed 3 to 12 m (10 to 40 ft) up in a tree and is constructed of twigs, pine needles, Spanish moss, paper, and other debris (Kale and Maehr 1990). Usually 4 or 5 eggs are laid in the compact cup-like nest. The eggs are variable in color, ranging from greenish, bluish, or buffy, and are spotted with brown. The incubation period is 16 to 18 days, and the young fledge at 17 to 21 days of age. The female does most of the incubating, and both parents feed the young (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Young birds are dependent for about 3 weeks after fledging and may be fed for an additional time (Harrison 1978). One captive Blue Jay lived to the age of 2 years (Coles 1986).

**Seasonal Occurrence.** Fall diurnal movements of Blue Jays, especially in north Florida, are sometimes quite conspicuous (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The Blue Jay nests from March through September (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), and some produce 2 or 3 broods (Howell 1932, Laskey 1958).

**Status.** Its loud "jay, jay, jay" call is well known, but its quiet song is rarely recognized. When nesting, the Blue Jay can be furtive and secretive. At other times, the birds travel in family groups or small flocks. These can often be heard calling loudly as they mob a roosting owl or a snake. One of the Blue Jay's common calls imitates the call of a Red-shouldered Hawk, and less commonly they imitate Red-tailed Hawks. Hailman (1990) reported a Blue Jay mimicking an Osprey. Formerly sporadic in the Keys (Howell 1932), the Blue Jay was found breeding in the upper Keys during the Atlas project (Paul 1989). Breeding was confirmed in every county in the state.

Jane Murray Brooks

# Blue Jay

