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Florida Scrub-Jay *Aphelocoma coerulescens*

The Florida Scrub-Jay is a crestless jay that lacks the white tail feathers and wing spots of the more widespread common *Blue Jay*. It is a distinct species found only in Florida (AOU 1995).

Habitat. Florida Scrub-Jays are largely restricted to scattered, often small and isolated patches of sand pine scrub, xeric (dry) oak scrub, scrubby flatwoods, and scrubby coastal stands in peninsular Florida (Woolfenden 1978a, Fitzpatrick et al. 1991). They avoid wetlands and forests, including canopied sand pine stands. Optimal Scrub-Jay habitat is dominated by shrubby scrub live oaks, myrtle oaks, or scrub oaks from 1 to 3 m (3 to 10 ft) tall, covering 50 to 90% of the area; bare ground or sparse vegetation less than 15 cm (6 in) tall covering 10 to 50% of the area; and scattered trees, with no more than 20% canopy cover (Fitzpatrick et al. 1991).



Scrub-Jays eat a variety of animal and plant items. Acorns are the birds' staple diet during fall and winter. Insects comprise an important food source during spring and summer. Other terrestrial invertebrates as well as vertebrates, including frogs, toads, lizards, snakes, nestling birds, birds' eggs, and mice are opportunistically preyed upon by Scrub-Jays (Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1990; B. Toland, unpubl. data).

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Florida Scrub-Jays typically nest in scrub oak thickets near a natural or manmade opening (B. Toland, unpubl. data). The nest, composed of coarse twigs and lined with cabbage palm or palmetto fibers, is placed 1 to 3 m (3 to 10 ft) above the ground (Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1984; B. Toland, unpubl. data). The clutch is most frequently 3 or 4 blue-green eggs speckled or spotted with dark purplish-brown (Harrison 1978). Incubation, by the female alone, requires 17 to 18 days, and the young fledge at about 16 to 18 days of age (Woolfenden 1978b, Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1984).

Seasonal Occurrence. Nesting takes place from early March through June (Woolfenden 1974; Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1991; B. Toland, unpubl. data). Monogamous, permanently territorial pairs are typically single-brooded throughout the interior Florida Scrub-Jay populations (Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1990), but as many 20% of the breeders are double-brooded in some coastal populations (B. Toland, unpubl. data).

Status. Florida Scrub-Jays are sedentary and territorial, existing in groups or families of 2 to 10 individuals. Routinely, 1 member of the flock acts as a sentinel, sitting on a conspicuous perch while the other birds forage (Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1984, McGowan and Woolfenden 1989).

Scrub Jays are most readily found during early spring, when their territorial displays are most intense and in late summer, when young of the year are still distinguishable by their dusky head and neck (Fitzpatrick et al. 1991). Florida Scrub-Jays are easy to locate during these periods by playing a tape recording of its territorial scolds.

Conversion of scrub habitats to citrus groves and suburbs along the central and coastal ridges has reduced the original jay range of about 18,130 km² (7,000 mi²) by more than half (Cox 1987a, Breining 1989). Currently the Florida Scrub-Jay is listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] (Woods 1991).

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Florida Scub Jay

