

# Florida scrub-jay

*Aphelocoma coerulescens*



(Photo by Craig Faulhaber, FWC)

## **Taxonomic Classification**

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum:** Chordata

**Class:** Aves

**Order:** Passeriformes

**Family:** Corvidae

**Genus/Species:** *Aphelocoma coerulescens*

**Common Name:** Florida scrub-jay

## **Listing Status**

**Federal Status:** Threatened

**FL Status:** Federally-designated Threatened

**FNAI Ranks:** G3/S3 (Rare)

**IUCN Status:** VU (Vulnerable)

## **Physical Description**

The Florida scrub-jay is a blue and gray bird that reaches lengths of 12 inches (30.5 centimeters) with a wing span of 13.5 inches (34.3 centimeters) (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2011). A

blue-colored necklace surrounds their neck, separating their whiter throat from their grayish breast. Florida scrub-jays also have a gray back and underparts, along with a blue head, tail, and wings (C. Faulhaber pers comm. 2011).

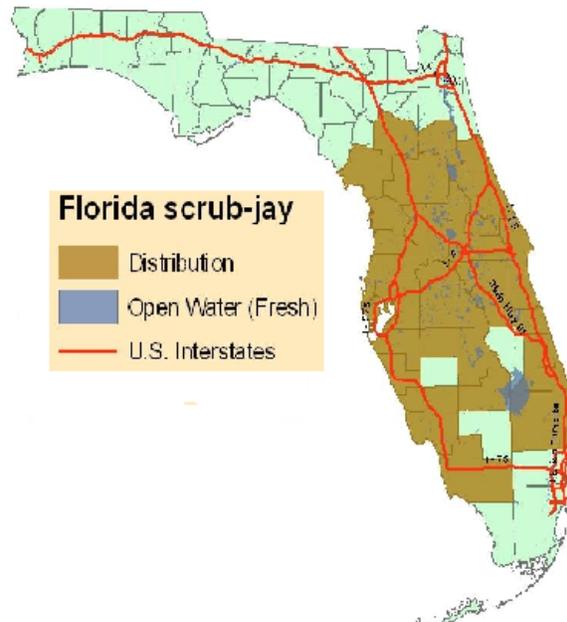
## **Life History**

The diet of the Florida scrub-jay primarily consists of insects, frogs, toads, lizards, mice, bird eggs, and acorns.

Florida scrub-jays live in family groups that consist of a breeding pair and their offspring. Scrub-jays begin breeding around the age of two to three years of age, and will continue breeding throughout their lifetime. Scrub-jays are cooperative breeders, as the young will stay with their parents for one or more years to help raise other young and defend the territory (C. Faulhaber pers comm. 2011). Scrub-jays have a short breeding season as eggs and juveniles are typically found in nests from March through June. Nests are developed from twigs and palmetto fibers and are built three to ten feet (.9 – 3 meters) off of the ground in shrubby oaks. Scrub-jays typically use the same nest each year. Florida scrub-jays usually have one brood (the young hatched from a single clutch) per year. The average clutch size for the scrub-jay is two to five eggs per nesting (C. Faulhaber pers comm. 2011). Eggs are incubated for 18 days and the juveniles are able to depart the nest 18 days after hatching. Non breeding scrub-jays will stay with their families for a year or two before they separate and develop their own territory.

## **Habitat & Distribution**

The Florida scrub-jay is the only species of bird that is unique to Florida. Scrub-jays inhabit sand pine and xeric oak scrub, and scrubby flatwoods, which occur in some of the highest and driest areas of Florida – ancient sandy ridges that run down the middle of the state, old sand dunes along the coasts, and sandy deposits along rivers in the interior of the state. Scrub-jays do best in areas that contain large quantities of oak shrubs that average 3.28-6.56 feet (one to two meters) (C. Faulhaber pers comm. 2011).



## **Threats**

The primary threats to the Florida scrub-jay are habitat destruction, fragmentation, and degradation from development and agriculture. Much of the scrub-jay's habitat has been altered for agricultural lands and development (C. Faulhaber pers comm. 2011). Habitat fragmentation is steadily increasing, and in turn causes populations to become smaller and more isolated. Increasing fragmentation causes populations to spread further apart. As populations become further apart, fewer scrub-jays are able to travel between the patches of habitat as they typically

do not travel long distances (C. Faulhaber pers comm. 2011). Small populations are at risk of disappearing because of this. Fire suppression degrades the scrub-jay's habitat, as the habitat becomes too dense and tall to support the species. The scrub-jay population has declined 90% in the past century due to these threats (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2001). Vehicle strikes are particularly dangerous to the population as the rate at which breeders die exceeds the rate at which young scrub-jays are produced (Johnson et al. 2009).

## **Conservation & Management**

The Florida scrub-jay is protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is also protected as a Threatened species by the Federal Endangered Species Act and as a Federally-designated Threatened species by [Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule](#). Prescribed burning is an essential element to conserving the Florida scrub-jay.

[-Federal Recovery Plan](#)

## **Other Informative Links**

[Birds of North America](#)

[FWC Species Profile](#)

[Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#)

[International Union for Conservation of Nature](#)

[The Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

[University of Florida IFAS Extension](#)

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#)

[U.S. Geological Survey](#)

## **References**

Florida Natural Areas Inventory. 2001. Field guide to the rare animals of Florida.  
[http://www.fnai.org/FieldGuide/pdf/Aphelocoma\\_coerulescens.PDF](http://www.fnai.org/FieldGuide/pdf/Aphelocoma_coerulescens.PDF)

Johnson, S. A., Miller, K. E., & Blunden, T. (2009, June). *The Florida Scrub-Jay: A Species in Peril*. Retrieved May 11, 2011, from University of Florida IFAS Extension:  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw306>

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology. (2011). *Florida Scrub-Jay*. Retrieved May 11, 2011, from All About Birds: [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Florida\\_Scrub-Jay/lifehistory](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Florida_Scrub-Jay/lifehistory)