

Florida Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*)

Key Identifiers: For both male and female

- 10-12 in (26-30 cm) in length
- No crest
- Blue head
- White forehead and eyebrow
- Grayish-white throat
with pale blue breast band
- Blue wings and nape
- Long blue tail
- Grayish-white underparts
(appears as streaking)
- Gray back
- Dark legs and bill



Note: Juvenile Florida scrub jays have entirely gray heads that turn blue when they reach approximately 6 months of age.

Habitat: The Florida scrub jay is the only bird species found exclusively in Florida. It inhabits scrub oak habitats, which consist of scrubby flatwoods, sand pine scrub, rosemary scrub, and coastal scrub. These are habitats with low growing oaks, shrubs, and in some cases scattered pines. Infrequent, high intensity fires maintain this type of habitat. Fire frequency varies between 10 and 100 years, depending on the type of oak scrub habitat. If fire is completely excluded, the habitat will become overgrown and unsuitable for scrub jay use.

Behavior: Florida scrub jays are cooperative breeders; they live in families that consist of a monogamous breeding pair and usually one or more helpers. The helpers are kids from previous breeding seasons, and assist the family in predator defense, territory defense, and with feeding new hatchlings.

Diet: Consist of acorns, insects, berries, seeds, small amphibians and reptiles, and even other birds. During the fall they can gather 6-8000 acorns, the majority of which are buried until they need them. Florida scrub jay fledglings are fed almost exclusively a diet of insects.

Nest: Scrub Jays nest from March to June. They lay from 3 to 4 eggs; however scrub jays suffer high mortality rates among the young.

Threats: Habitat loss is currently the greatest threat to Florida scrub jays. The high, dry habitats that scrub jays depend on are being rapidly converted for human use. Fire suppression also will cause habitat to be overgrown and unsuitable for scrub jay use. Florida scrub jays that are forced into human areas, like many birds, have to contend with outdoor domestic and feral cats that can make easy pickings of the uncoordinated fledglings. Several species of hawks will also prey upon scrub jays. Snakes and raccoons are very important predators on nests. However, the very nature of cooperative breeding means that there are always at least one set of eyes on guard against predators.

Banding Project: Currently Volusia County is undergoing a countywide banding project with the hopes of banding as many scrub jays as possible. The purpose for banding all of these birds is to follow their movement as their habitat becomes developed, and to identify any trends in the population.

Scrub Jays are federally protected and listed as threatened by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.