

## Threats

The greatest threat to scrub-jay populations is habitat loss due to residential, commercial, and agricultural development. Many isolated populations have been eliminated and others have been irreparably fragmented by urban development. Preservation of existing populations is of paramount importance, as is habitat management within designated sanctuaries. In natural areas and preserves, prescribed burning is the most critical element in the preservation of scrub habitat.



Feral cat

Where residential areas overlap into scrub-jay territories, the jays have been found to be very tolerant of human presence.

In order to accommodate the jays, landowners can provide islands of scrub oaks in their landscape. Also, mowed areas mirror natural openings in scrub habitat. It is also important for pet owners to keep cats and dogs indoors.

**Upon locating a dead, injured, or sick specimen of any covered species or any other threatened or endangered species notification should be made as soon as possible to the:**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1-352-429-1037; AND**

**Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation  
Commission 1-888-404-3922**

## How you can help

**Provide habitat for scrub-jays.** Plant, protect, and cultivate patches of sand live oak, myrtle oak, and Chapman's oak on your property. Your local Cooperative Extension Service can recommend other appropriate scrub plants to suit your landscaping needs.

**Protect scrub-jays from your pets.** Protect areas being used by nesting scrub-jays from domestic animals, **especially cats.**

**Restrict the use of pesticides.** Scrub-jays feed on insects usually considered pests around golf courses and homes. Pesticides may limit or contaminate food used by the jays. Reduce the use of pesticides as much as possible.

**Report malicious destruction or harassment of scrub-jays or their nests.** Call FFWCC toll-free: **1-888-404-3922**

**Support the establishment of regional and local scrub-jay preserves.** Protection of scrub-jay populations on managed tracts of optimal habitat is the best means of protecting this species.

Palm Bay supports the purchase of large tracts of land through an environmental service fee that is levied on each new building permit.

For more information please contact:  
City of Palm Bay  
Building Division  
Phone: 321-953-8924  
Email: [pbldg@palmbayflorida.org](mailto:pbldg@palmbayflorida.org)  
Website: [www.palmbayflorida.org](http://www.palmbayflorida.org)



## The Florida Scrub-Jay

A  
Threatened  
Species



## Protection

The Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) was listed as a Threatened Species by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 1987 and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in 1975. It is unlawful to possess, harass, kill, or collect this species' nest and eggs, or to harm the birds in any manner.



Male Florida scrub-jay

If you are planning to build on land with scrub habitat, contact these agencies to avoid possible impacts to scrub-jays. Please refer to the City of Palm Bay website for additional restrictions on lots within designated scrub-jay habitat.

## Natural History

Scrub-jay pairs mate for life. They also raise their young in cooperative family groups, a fascinating aspect of scrub-jay family life. The family group consists of a breeding pair and their offspring, which act as helpers. Helpers assist in defending the breeding territory, nest, and young. However, only the breeding pair, never the helpers, participate in nest-building, incubating, and brooding activities. This takes place from late February through the end of June. Long-term studies have established that breeding pairs with helpers successfully raise more young than do lone pairs.

Scrub-jays are non-migratory birds, and therefore each family maintains a permanent territory ranging from 5 to 50 acres (averaging about 25 acres.) Territories increase in size as the family group grows and when the habitat is less than optimal. Scrub-jays will defend their territory from adjacent families and predators, including house cats.

Scrub-jays eat a variety of animals and plants. Insects comprise a major food source during spring and summer. They may also prey on frogs, toads, lizards, snakes, birds' eggs, and even mice. In addition, each scrub-jay harvests and buries 6,000 to 8,000 acorns from August to November for use throughout the year. Scrub-jays will also eat corn, peanuts, and sunflower seeds.

## Habitat



Florida scrub-jay habitat

Scrub is characterized by 3-4 species of stunted, low-growing oaks and scattered sandy clearings. Preferred scrub-jay habitat occurs when the oaks are between 3-10 feet tall, along with sandy openings and very few scattered trees.

## Identification

The Florida scrub-jay is generally between 10-12 inches long. It is a blue and gray crestless jay that lacks the white wing spots and tail feather tips of the more common blue jay. The head, neck, nape, and tail are blue while the back and belly are pale gray. A necklace of blue feathers separates the whiter throat from the gray under parts; and a white line over the eye often blends into a whitish forehead. Males and females are similar in appearance. Juveniles can be distinguished from adults by their dusky brown head and neck.

