
January 1992

Ecology and Development-related Habitat Requirements of the Florida Scrub Jay (*aphelocoma Coerulescens Coeruiescens*)

Florida Field Naturalist

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Recommended Citation

Florida Field Naturalist (1992) "Ecology and Development-related Habitat Requirements of the Florida Scrub Jay (*aphelocoma Coerulescens Coeruiescens*)," *Florida Field Naturalist*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 7. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol20/iss1/7>

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REVIEW

Fla. Field Nat. 20(1): 23-24, 1992.

Ecology and Development-Related Habitat Requirements of the Florida Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens coerulescens*)—J. W. Fitzpatrick, G. E. Woolfenden, and M. T. Kopeny, 1991. Tallahassee, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Nongame Wildlife Program Technical Report No. 8. 49 p.—The extensive loss of scrub habitat to development during the last two decades has led to a decline in population levels of the Florida Scrub Jay, a species now listed as threatened by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (FGFWFC) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To help minimize the further loss of Scrub Jays, Archbold Biological Station researchers John Fitzpatrick and Glen Woolfenden have joined efforts with Mark Kopeny of the FGFWFC to produce this important technical report which contains habitat preservation guidelines. The report does not constitute the official rules or formal policies of the FGFWFC; however, the recommendations represent the best attempt by the most qualified experts to achieve a balance between the need to protect Scrub Jays and their habitat and the reality that new development will reduce available habitat.

The report is divided into two main sections. The first section describes the recommendations for the protection of Scrub Jay habitat. The second section provides the justification and rationale for the recommendations given in Section One. Much of the discussion on the ecology and habitat requirements of Scrub Jays in Section Two is derived from the book by Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick (1984, *The Florida Scrub Jay: Demography of a Cooperative Breeding Bird*, Princeton University Press), which was reviewed by R. Breitwisch (1985, Fla. Field Nat. 13: 100-102). Updated information was added to the existing data base to present the current state of understanding of Scrub Jay biology. Among the most useful research results provided are: 1) stable territories for single breeding groups range in size from 4 to 18 ha (10 to 45 acres), and 2) the maximum confirmed dispersal distance at Archbold Biological Station is 5.6 km (about 3.4 miles). These findings form the basis of the recommendations that the average space requirement of the Florida Scrub Jay should be considered to be 25 acres per territory, and that some movement of jays may occur between isolated scrub preserves within about five miles of one another.

The recommendations in Section One rely heavily on newly defined terms (e.g., type I, II, and III habitats, territory versus satellite refuges, etc.). Avoiding the jargon, the following is my simplified summary of the recommendations. If a proposed development is within the current range of the Florida Scrub Jay and native habitat exists on the parcel, then a survey for Scrub Jays should be conducted. If jays are not present but at least a portion of the site has good jay habitat (i.e., $\geq 15\%$ scrub oak cover), then it should be determined if Scrub Jays occur within five miles of the site. If Scrub Jays occur or have occurred within five miles of the site since 1975, it is recommended that a minimum of 25% of the good jay habitat be preserved on-site. If Scrub Jays are found on-site, then at least 25 acres of habitat should be preserved for each jay family. If after applying this preservation standard, there is still good jay habitat unprotected, then 25% of this remaining scrub should also be preserved on-site. A contribution of land or money for the purchase of scrub in lieu of on-site preservation is only recommended when the acreage designated to be preserved is less than 10 acres, or when the calculated preservation requirement turns out to be a large proportion of all developable uplands on-site. Ideally, the scrub preserve areas should: 1) contain the highest quality habitat, 2) be established in a single tract shaped to minimize the edge-to-area ratio, 3) be away from roads with speed limits over 30 mph, and 4) be managed through a controlled burn program.

The guidelines in the report are necessary to protect Scrub Jays. They should be used by local government, regional, and state planners and biologists; developers and their consultants; landscape designers; and land managers. The guidelines are fair to developers who can benefit by having Scrub Jays as an amenity on their property. For many large developments, the scrub preserves can be designed into the land use plan by clustering structures on the site. Aside from creating the space for a scrub preserve, additional benefits of clustered development include reduced energy needs and expenses for public facilities.

The most difficult problem in applying the recommendations in the report may be in the management of the preserve areas. The unwillingness to use fire as a management technique is widespread in the development community and among local government officials. Even when a developer favors a burn program, the local government's Fire Marshall may be reluctant to issue a burn permit because of the expected number of complaints from nearby residents. A properly designed controlled burn program will have a minimum impact on nearby developed areas. Education of the citizens and local government officials on the importance of fire management in maintaining Scrub Jay habitat is a critical step in establishing successful scrub preserves in urbanizing areas.—**Peter G. Merritt**, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, 3228 S.W. Martin Downs Blvd., Suite 205, Palm City, FL 34990.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Fla. Field Nat. 20(1): 24-28, 1992.

Summer Report: June-August 1991.—The observations listed here are based on accounts of rare birds and unusual numbers of birds reported to the Florida Ornithological Society (FOS) Field Observation Committee, whose names and addresses appear at the end of this report. The observations are not subjected to a thorough evaluation and formal peer review and thus must be considered tentative pending further review. We encourage observers to report their sightings to the FOS Records Committee (c/o Jocelyn Lee Baker, Secretary, 851 N. Surf Rd., #302, Hollywood, FL, 33019) for formal consideration. We also encourage observers to prepare formal notes and articles to describe extremely rare and unusual sightings.

Several conventions are used to save space. The first name of contributors is abbreviated in the accounts of individual species; full names of contributors are presented at the end of the report. The common names of species are used exclusively. Persons interested in scientific names should consult AOU (1983. Checklist of the North American Birds, 6th ed., Washington, D.C., Am. Ornithol. Union) and revisions published in *The Auk*. Other abbreviations used occasionally are: imm., immature; m. obs., many observers; NM, national monument; NP, national park; NS, national seashore; NWR, national wildlife refuge; SP, state park; SRA, state recreation area; WMA, wildlife management area, and S, W, N, E, etc. for compass headings. Unless necessary to clarify the location, the counties of named locations are omitted.

The FOS Field Observation Committee would like to thank everyone who contributed information. Please bring any unusual observations not reported here to the attention of Jim Cox, compiler. The deadline for the submission of records to regional compilers is two weeks after the close of each period. Reporting periods are "Fall" (September-November), "Winter" (December-February), "Spring" (March-May), and "Summer" (June-August).