



Audubon FLORIDA



Jay Watch Report

2017 ANNUAL SUMMARY

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

for Florida's Only Endemic Bird Species



Spring blooms and bright sunlight signal to me that time fast approaches to map and census Florida Scrub-Jays with Audubon volunteers and our many partners. Time in our state's rare scrub habitat with those stunning blue, silver, and black birds helps replenish my passion for birds and wildlife conservation. **Last year was a good year for the Florida Scrub-Jay, and we saw increases in Scrub-Jay juveniles at Audubon-monitored sites.** Please enjoy the stories in this annual summary as we celebrate the dedicated work of our scientists, volunteers, and agency partners. This issue features an exciting new survey partnership in Ocala National Forest, the return of Florida Scrub-Jays in key areas of our State Parks and highlights about the many people and places that are vital to the survival of Florida Scrub-Jays.

Dr. Marianne Korosy

Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Florida

As Audubon's Jay Watch coordinator, I have the immense pleasure of working with a highly dedicated and passionate group of volunteers. Whether attending informative trainings, doing surveys in the field or celebrating at our annual appreciation event, we all share a common goal: help protect this iconic species. Together, we make a significant contribution to citizen science and the future of the Florida Scrub-Jay. Thank you to our hard-working volunteers, generous supporters, and caring partners.

Jacqui Sulek

Jay Watch Coordinator, Audubon Florida

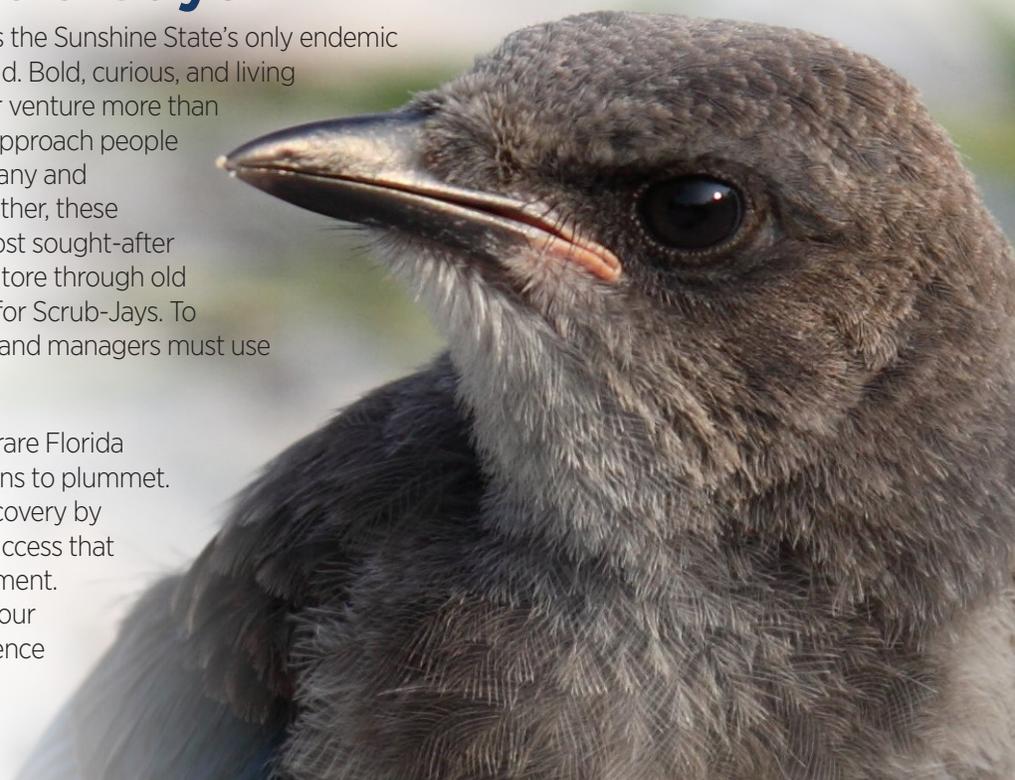


Why Protect Scrub-Jays?

The federally Threatened Florida Scrub-Jay is the Sunshine State's only endemic bird species – found nowhere else in the world. Bold, curious, and living in cooperative family groups, most jays never venture more than a few miles from where they hatched. They approach people closely out of curiosity, endearing them to many and creating treasured photo opportunities. Together, these traits make the Scrub-Jay one of Florida's most sought-after wildlife sightings in the world. Wildfires once tore through old Florida, creating and restoring scrub habitat for Scrub-Jays. To emulate natural fire and keep scrub healthy, land managers must use prescribed burns.

Sadly, habitat destruction and lack of fire on rare Florida scrublands Scrub-Jay have caused populations to plummet. Audubon Jay Watch promotes Scrub-Jay recovery by providing essential data on annual nesting success that is needed to optimize scrub habitat management.

They need our help to recover and thrive. Your support for Audubon's Jay Watch citizen science program is vital.



Cover note: The bird on our cover is one of only two Scrub-Jays at Jupiter Ridge Natural Area in Palm Beach County, a county with only a handful of Scrub-Jays remaining due to intensive urbanization and scrub habitat destruction. Photo by Susan Faulkner Davis.

Audubon Fights to Keep Busy Highway Out of Critical Scrub-Jay Habitat

The Central Florida Expressway Authority (CFX) and collaborating land developers are pressing forward with a destructive plan that would route part of the new Osceola Parkway through the Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area in Osceola County. The initial proposal cut through the heart of Split Oak Preserve and ran directly through the middle of valuable scrub habitat, home to several Scrub-Jay families. Property managers argue that in addition to habitat loss, the existence of a highway through the heart of Split Oak would have a dramatic negative impact on the necessary prescribed fires for the preserve.

After strong opposition by Audubon Florida, Orange Audubon Society, Kissimmee Valley Audubon Society, and others, CFX invited conservation groups into the planning process to help find a better route that minimizes impacts to rare jays and their dwindling habitat. Audubon has led discussions during the last several weeks with progress made toward shifting the highway far away from the heart of the Preserve and resident Scrub-Jays. With the help of a strong grassroots network and dedicated Jay Watchers, Audubon will continue fighting for one of the last remaining sanctuaries for Scrub-Jays in Central Florida.



Restoration Makes a Difference

Hard-working volunteers and partners helped Audubon restore vital Scrub-Jay habitat in Manatee County by removing sand pines. While it might seem unusual to remove trees to help birds, tall sand pines and thickets provide the perfect perches for predators of the Florida Scrub-Jay like hawks. Also, sand pines shed needles that cover bare sand patches, making it difficult for Scrub-Jays to recover buried acorns and bury new ones needed for their winter food supply. And tall pines shade out sun-loving scrub oaks and other rare scrubland plants. Restoring overgrown scrub habitat on public lands, such as the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Little Manatee-Southfork tract in Manatee County, is an essential step to recovering local Scrub-Jay populations.

At this site, Audubon Jay Watch partnered with land manager South West Florida Water Management District, Florida Trail Association, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Ridge Rangers, and Quest Ecology to cut sand pines in February 2017. Audubon's work at this site creates a brighter future for more Scrub-Jay families. In two days of chain-sawing and hand-sawing, volunteers cut down many tall pines and hundreds of smaller pines invading the open scrub habitat. An added bonus: once the sappy pine wood dries it provides vital fuel that helps carry prescribed fire across the hard-to-burn sandy scrub habitat.



Tall sand pine stand provides cover for avian predators to prey on unsuspecting Scrub-Jays.



Wide visibility allows sentinel Scrub-Jays to spot avian predators and warn family group members to seek cover quickly.

DID YOU KNOW?

Relic Florida sand dunes left over from a time when sea levels were much higher are the only place in the world where you can find Florida scrub habitat. This extreme habitat is the only home of the Florida Scrub-Jay and little scrub remains for the jays. While Audubon works hard to conserve this dwindling available habitat for jays; strong management of existing scrub habitat also is critical. Since most scrub in Florida is overgrown, restoration is necessary to rejuvenate Scrub-Jay populations.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE - by the numbers

4 Scrub Oak Tree Species
Native to Scrublands

318 Scrub-Jay
Families Counted

798 Scrub-Jay
Adults Counted

290+ Scrub-Jay
Juveniles Counted

6,500 Acorns Buried
Per Scrub-Jay



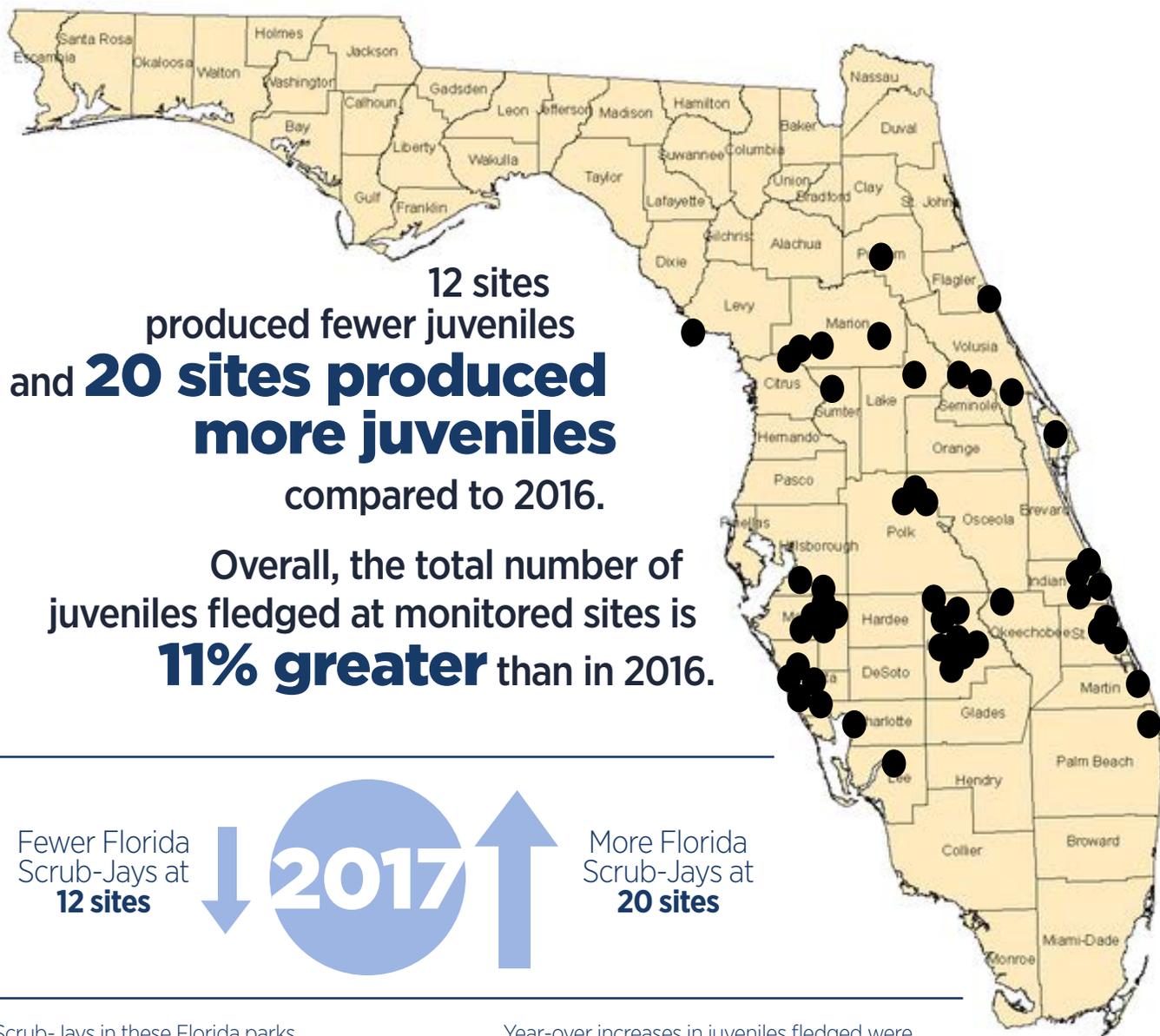
267 volunteers generously gave **2,600** hours at
46 Jay Watch sites in **19** Florida counties.

MONITORING & PROTECTING FLORIDA SCRUB JAYS

EXCITING NEWS: Scrub-Jays return to Lake Kissimmee State Park

Five Florida Scrub-Jay groups (totaling 18 birds) called Lake Kissimmee State Park home in 2012. But by 2016 and 2017 Jay Watch surveys registered no Scrub-Jays at all. Audubon and Park biologists were unable to determine why they abandoned the site, but dedicated Jay Watchers Fred and Sharon Allen spotted a pair of Scrub-Jays in the Buster Island section of the park in December and again in January. Will they set up nesting in 2018 and will other jays join them to repopulate this beautiful park? Stay tuned...

46 Sites Monitored by Jay Watch Community Scientists in 2017



Florida Scrub-Jays in these Florida parks fledged more juveniles in 2017 than in 2016:
Highlands Hammock
Lake June-in-Winter Scrub Preserve
Rock Springs Run,
Jonathan Dickinson
Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek
Oscar Scherer
Blue Spring

Year-over increases in juveniles fledged were also seen at FWC and locally managed properties:
Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area in central Highlands County
Moody Branch Mitigation Area in Manatee County
St. Lucie County's Indrio Savannahs Preserve
SFWMD's Lake Marion Creek Wildlife Management Area
SFWMD's Potts Preserve
Volusia County's Lyonia Preserve

Scientists Report that Relocating Scrub-Jays Shows Promise and New Hope for Species

Tucked away in Ocala National Forest, Hughes Island is a “donor site”- one with a stable population that can donate Scrub-Jays for relocation elsewhere in the state. Led by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, state officials began a Scrub-Jay translocation program just last year in an attempt to save this imperiled species. Scrub-Jay translocation – moving Scrub-Jays from sites with stable, healthy populations to sites that include some unoccupied but optimal scrub habitat – so far has shown to be a promising tool.

Leading Jay Watch surveys across the state, Audubon was asked to partner with the federal and state officials to census jays at Hughes Island in July 2017. Most survey sites are easily accessed by Jay Watch volunteers. But this site required hearty volunteers with GPS expertise to brave scrub thickets, locate survey stations, and collect data in the searing July heat.



Jay Watch volunteers with FWC and USFWS staff and interns on the Hughes Island survey team

Given the habitat restoration, the vast landscape, and the presence of so many family groups in Ocala National Forest, the future of the Florida Scrub-Jay looks hopeful. Audubon citizen scientists report that the Scrub-Jay population at Hughes Island is healthy and growing, signaling a thumbs up for donating individuals for translocation.

Volunteers who braved the rigorous conditions and completed the three-day survey deserve a special shout-out: Brinda Curran, Zachery Holmes, Kim Rexroat, and Karen Tobi. We look forward to continued collaboration with our partners at Hughes Island and hope to see more hearty Jay Watchers in Ocala National Forest in 2018.

Special Thanks to 2017 Jay Watch Major Donors

Batchelor Foundation | The Walt Disney Company | Mosaic Company Foundation

Audubon Chapters with Jay Watch participants

Alachua Audubon Society
Audubon Society of the Everglades
Audubon of Southwest Florida
Citrus Audubon Society
Eagle Audubon Society
Flagler Audubon Society
Four Rivers Audubon Society
Halifax River Audubon Society
Hendry-Glades Audubon Society
Highlands County Audubon Society
Kissimmee Valley Audubon Society
Lake Region Audubon Society
Manatee County Audubon Society
Marion Audubon Society

Audubon of Martin County
Orange Audubon Society
Peace River Audubon Society
Pelican Island Audubon Society
Ridge Audubon Society
St. Lucie Audubon Society
Santa Fe Audubon Society
Sarasota Audubon Society
Seminole Audubon Society
Space Coast Audubon Society
Tampa Audubon Society
Venice Area Audubon Society
West Volusia Audubon Society

Join Jay Watch and Help Audubon Support Florida Scrub-Jay Recovery

Email Audubon’s Jacqui Sulek: jsulek@audubon.org

Donate

fl.audubon.org/SupportJayWatch

Get Involved

AudubonJayWatch.org

