



Audubon FLORIDA



**Five-Year
Summary Report
2012 - 2016**

Photo: Brinda Curran

February 2017

Making a Difference: Audubon Florida Celebrates 5th Year of Jay Watch Leadership!

Audubon Florida began overseeing leadership of the Jay Watch program in 2012 and we've been working hard to grow the program since then. In the following pages, join us in celebrating five years training the many dedicated volunteers, site managers, and partner agency staff who map and census the federally Threatened Florida Scrub-Jay on more than 40 scrubland sites.



Marianne Korosy, Ph.D.
Director of Bird Conservation
Audubon Florida

Why Protect Florida Scrub-Jays?



The federally Threatened Florida Scrub-Jay is the Sunshine State's only endemic bird species – found nowhere else in the world. Florida Scrub-Jays are a striking blue, silver-gray, and black. They are bold, curious, vocal, and live in cooperative family groups. Scrub-Jays are non-migratory, with most birds never venturing more than a couple miles from where they hatched. And they approach people closely out of curiosity at many sites around the state, endearing them to many and creating a multitude of treasured photo opportunities. Together, these traits make the Scrub-Jay one of Florida's most sought-after wildlife sightings. Habitat loss and fire suppression of rare Florida scrublands – the Scrub-Jays' prime habitat – have caused historical populations to plummet. They need our help to recover and thrive. Audubon Jay Watch promotes Scrub-Jay recovery by providing essential data needed to optimize scrub habitat management.

DONATE

Help Audubon Support Recovery of
Florida Scrub-Jays

fl.audubon.org/SupportJayWatch

A recent encounter with a Florida Scrub-Jay family reminded me when the Scrub-Jay seemed common in central Florida. As a Florida native, the delightfully curious yet endangered Florida Scrub-Jay holds a special place in my heart. I'm glad Audubon has a dedicated volunteer force working to protect the species and its habitat.

Rallying hundreds of volunteers and equipping them with the resources to protect jays and restore habitat is only possible with your support.

Thank you for believing in Florida's only endemic bird.



Eric Draper
Executive Director
Audubon Florida

Jay Watch by the Numbers

12,036

Volunteer hours surveying Scrub-Jays, 2012-2016



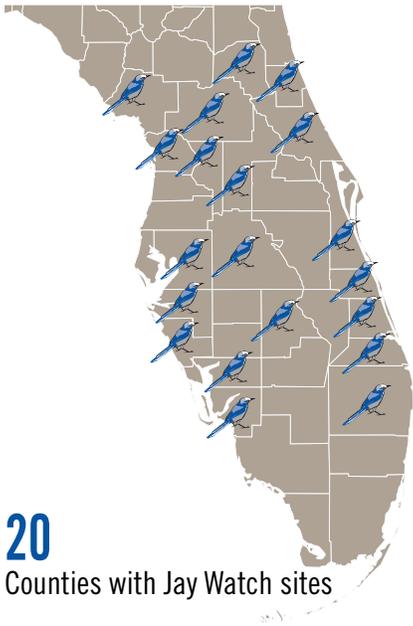
751

Florida Scrub-Jays Counted, 2016



270

Volunteers Each Year



20

Counties with Jay Watch sites

77,000

Acres Surveyed



23

5-year Jay Watch veterans at 2016 volunteer celebration



271

Florida Scrub-Jay families surveyed, 2016.

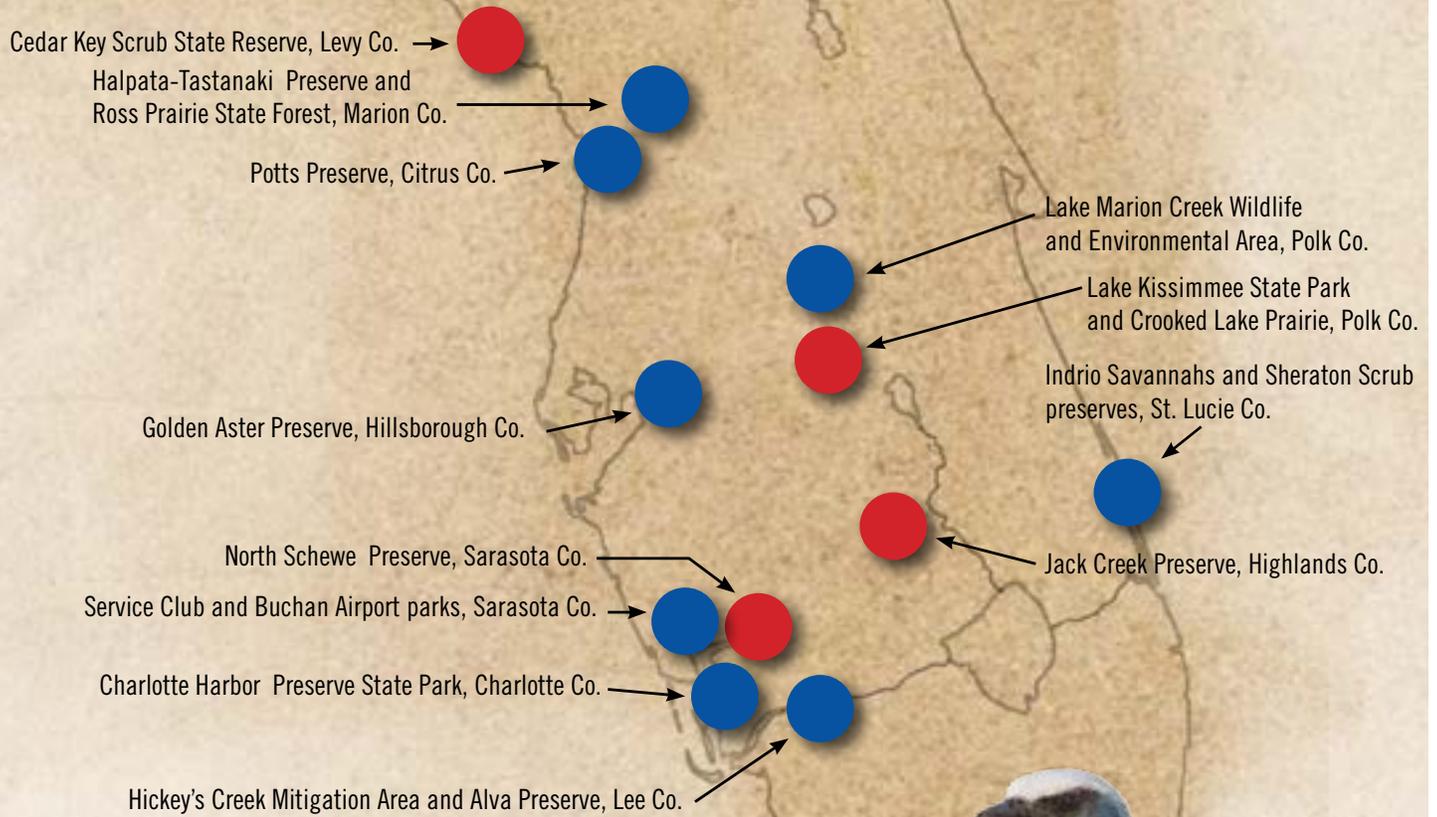


82

Volunteers learned more about Florida Scrub-Jays and celebrated at the 2016 Volunteer Appreciation event



Jay Watch Sites Gained and Lost 2012-2016



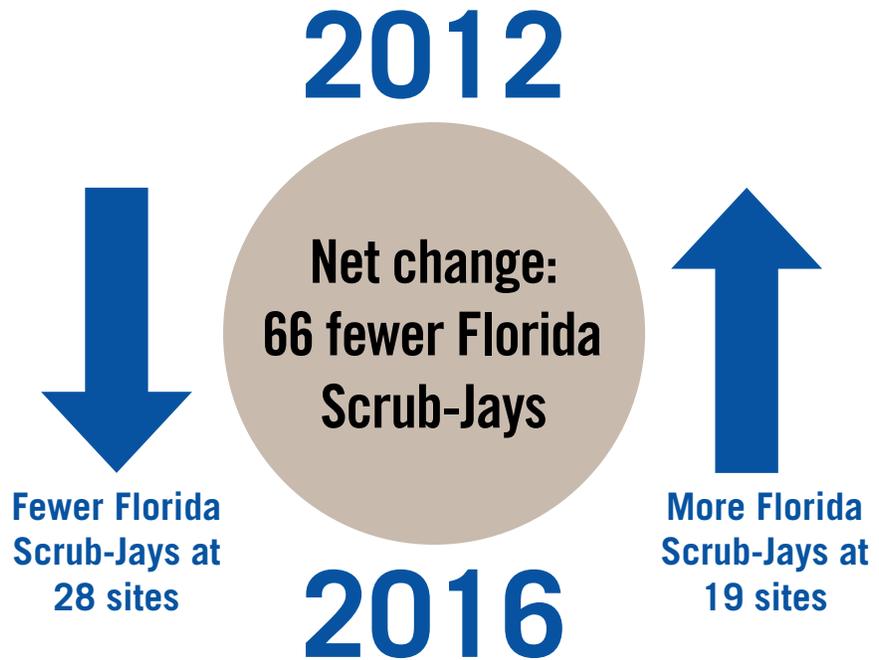
-  Sites added to Jay Watch citizen science network
-  Florida Scrub-Jays no longer present on site as of 2016

While jays disappeared at four sites due to lapses in prescribed burning and to habitat loss in surrounding areas, Jay Watch volunteers were able to add surveys at seven previously unmonitored properties. These observations help to inform land managers about the timing of and effectiveness of prescribed fire.



Five-year Snapshot: Scrub-Jays Show Overall Decline at Jay Watch Sites

Despite the overall decline in the past five years, there is cause for hope. Prescribed burns and other land management actions were instituted at several of these declining-trend sites that began reversing the downward trend during the five-year period ending in 2016, as shown in the graph of juvenile production below.

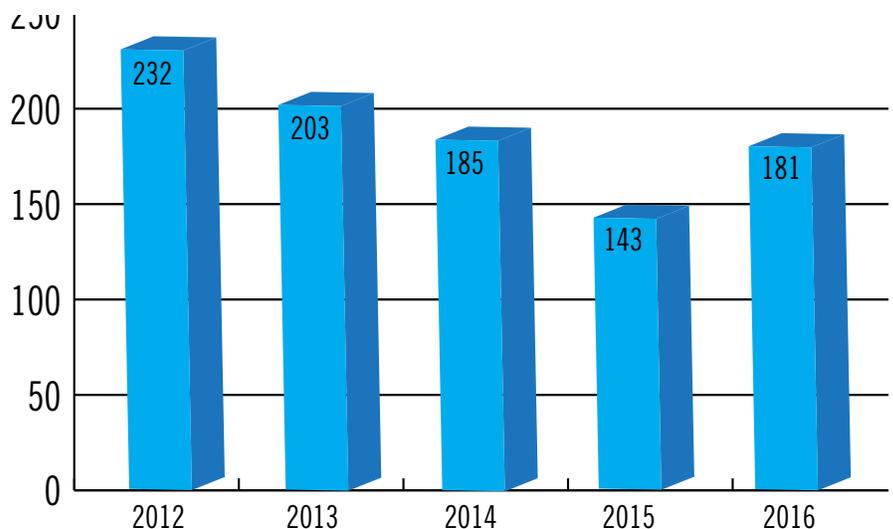


Juvenile Scrub-Jays Rebound at Jay Watch Sites in 2016!

Annual breeding success is a function of many variables including extent and timing of the most recent prescribed burns, mechanical vegetation thinning (e.g., roller-chopping), and rainfall and temperature patterns in the winter months preceding each nesting season. Cold or dry winters or late, dry cold snaps reduce the abundance of Scrub-Jay prey items such as insects, caterpillars, and frogs. Warm, wet winters increase prey abundance and provide food needed to fledge more young Scrub-Jays.

Following four years of decline, breeding success rebounded in 2016 after a warm, wet winter produced plenty of insects, caterpillars, and frogs for adult Scrub-Jays and their offspring. What will 2017 bring? Find out by joining Jay Watch in one of our upcoming trainings! The schedule will be published in March 2017 on our website <http://fl.audubon.org/jaywatch>

**Annual count of fledged juveniles
at Jay Watch sites**



Bringing Back Scrub-Jays' Habitat

Jay Watchers don't just want to monitor the species' decline, we want to slow and reverse it.

A winter workday is a cool-weather opportunity to see Scrub-Jays while dedicating hands-on time that directly improves their habitat. On sites where habitat has gone long unburned, it is sometimes necessary to manually thin vegetation and cut tall, fast-burning sand pines to reduce the risk of unchecked wildfire before prescribed fires are set. This is where our cool-season habitat restoration partnerships with site managers come in!

2013

Lyonia Preserve, Volusia County



Jay Watch's first entry into scrub habitat restoration was in April 2013. Audubon partnered with Volusia County Environmental Lands and Wells Fargo's Orlando region "Green Team" for a half day of hand-lopping sand pine saplings at Lyonia Preserve. The Preserve is tightly wrapped by urban development making it a tough place to set a fire without smoking out neighboring homes and schools. Twenty members of Wells Fargo's Green Team hand-lopped 3,509 sand pine saplings in a couple hours of hot, hard work.

2014

Little Manatee-Southfork Preserve, Manatee County



In February 2014, Audubon Jay Watch volunteers partnered with the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the Florida Trail Association's Suncoast Chapter to cut sand pines at the District's Little Manatee-Southfork Preserve in Manatee County. The Florida Trail partnership added three chain sawyer teams to the Jay Watchers team using hand-loppers. In a half day's work, we cleared sand pines from 11 acres of scrub habitat occupied by two Scrub-Jay family families.

2015

Duette Preserve, Manatee County



In 2015, Audubon's annual scrub restoration project took a different tack. At Duette Preserve, Jay Watch data collected from 2012 through 2015 showed that the number of Scrub-Jays along the survey route declined from 11 to 4 birds, with no juveniles produced in 2015. The former Scrub-Jay residents may have moved on from this overgrown habitat to another area in which they could raise young in less peril from predators. In 2015, Audubon partnered with Quest Ecology to trim the pines and tall scrub oaks on 75 scrub acres. In 2016 – success! That single pair of

Scrub-Jays that didn't fledge young in 2015 had a fledged juvenile! Although this could have been random bird "luck," it is likely that the tree removal restored the low and open character of optimal scrub habitat and gave a reduced-predation-risk edge to this breeding pair so they could once again successfully fledge young.



In 2016, Audubon Jay Watch partnered with the Ridge Rangers, a volunteer corps of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, to cut sand pines in overgrown scrub habitat in the Tiger Branch area of Highlands Hammock State Park. A lone pair of Florida Scrub-Jays called this area “home” beginning in 2015 but the overgrown habitat could host many more birds if restored to the low and open quality Scrub-Jays prefer.

By mid-day on January 16, 31 volunteers working with three Park Service staff using chain saws, pole saws, and hand loppers had felled 1,891 small to tall sand pines on 37 acres of scrub. Audubon provided a hearty lunch for all the volunteers and staff after the morning’s work. The Ridge Rangers’ chain sawyer teams returned to work with the Park and finished cutting pines on the remainder of the overgrown 37-acre tract.

Why remove sand pines?

Sand pines provide perches for hawks, owls, and crows, shielding these fast-flying predators enabling them to make lunch of Florida Scrub-Jays and their naive young offspring. Like all pine trees, sand pines drop needle duff which covers the bare sand patches making it difficult for the birds to bury acorns – their winter food supply – and to relocate their buried cache. If the thicker stands of more mature sand pines aren’t cut prior to a prescribed burn, their seed cones open during the fire, producing a new generation of saplings that can create dense sand pine forest patches within overgrown scrub.



According to the Park, work completed just that morning would’ve taken them three or four months to accomplish alone.



Sand pines cut down during restoration work days are left in place to dry out and provide fuel for prescribed fires. Burned wood provides nutrients needed to enrich sandy soils and nourish the scrub plants. In turn, scrub plants provide cover and food for the insects and other animals consumed by Florida Scrub-Jays.

“THANK YOU”
to Audubon Jay Watchers and all of our generous, dedicated scrub-land partners who made these events possible with equipment and know-how, smiles and hard work.

Special Thanks to 2016 Jay Watch Donors

Batchelor Foundation
The Walt Disney Company
Mosaic Company Foundation
Wells Fargo

Jay Watch Partner Organizations

Archbold Biological Station
Florida State Parks
Office of Greenways and Trails,
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Florida Forest Service
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Charlotte County
Lee County
Manatee County
Quest Ecology, Inc.
St. Lucie County
Sarasota County
Volusia County
South Florida Water Management District
Southwest Florida Water Management District
St. Johns River Water Management District
The Nature Conservancy
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Audubon Chapters with Jay Watch participants

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
Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society
Santa Fe Audubon Society
Sarasota Audubon Society
Seminole Audubon Society
Space Coast Audubon Society
Tampa Audubon Society
Venice Area Audubon Society
West Pasco 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

fl.audubon.org/jaywatch

