



Audubon | FLORIDA



Jay Watch Report

2018 ANNUAL SUMMARY

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. 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 the 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 today use prescribed burns. Sadly, the lack of fire causes scrub to become overgrown and rife with Scrub-Jay predators such as Cooper's Hawks. Destruction of scrublands for roadways, development, and agriculture combined with habitat deterioration caused Scrub-Jay populations to plummet. But there's reason for hope. Audubon Jay Watch promotes Scrub-Jay recovery by:

- Collaborating with land managers to protect the species,
- Providing essential data on nesting success that is needed to schedule burns and better manage the land, and
- Working with partners, volunteers and Audubon staff to restore vital Scrub-Jay habitat.

Florida Scrub-Jays need our help to recover and thrive. Volunteer-led surveys of those gorgeous silver-and-blue adults and their sometimes comical youngsters make each day in the scrub an inspiring delight. Audubon needs your support – as volunteers, donors, and partners – to continue protecting these incredible jays in the few remaining places they're found in Florida.

Thank you for all that you do,

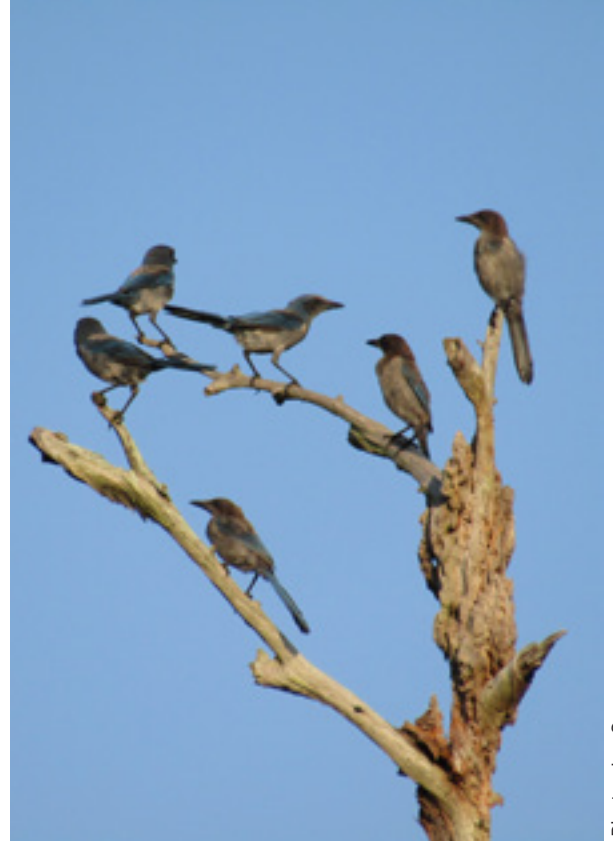
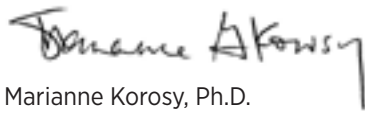
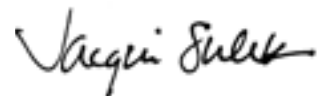


Photo: Joe Sage



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



Jacqui Sulek
Jay Watch Coordinator
Audubon Florida

P.S. - We train hundreds of volunteers each year at Jay Watch trainings and conduct annual Scrub-Jay surveys at parks and preserves in 20 counties across the Florida peninsula. Flip to the back page to learn how you can get involved!

Audubon Advocacy Protects Important Habitat and Conservation Land for Florida Scrub-Jays and Other Wildlife

Recently, Audubon Florida and Audubon advocates worked to defend important conservation lands in Central Florida from an unnecessary road project. The "Coastal Connector" project proposed several routes that slice through the heart of critical Central Florida conservation lands, wetlands, and rural areas. The Florida Scrub-Jay depends on large, undisturbed tracts of scrub habitat, and a huge project like this could displace many jay families. Audubon's Charles Lee rallied local Audubon chapters, Jay Watchers, and advocates to speak at public meetings and write to elected officials. It appears Audubon has been successful in stopping the project, but new threats to conservation and Florida Scrub-Jays emerge often. Be sure you are a part of the Audubon Action Network to learn how you can use your voice to protect birds and the places they need. Sign up at FL.Audubon.org/SignUp today.

Audubon Jay Watch – By The Numbers

Florida Scrub-Jays are truly a delight to behold for community scientists, birders, and professional biologists alike. In Jay Watch's 17th year, 270 volunteers generously dedicated 3,000 hours to survey and map Florida Scrub-Jays at 46 sites across the Sunshine State. Audubon is grateful for the volunteers who give their time, talents, and treasures to the species. Thanks to Audubon Jay Watch supporters, new scrub-land sites surveyed for the first time by Jay Watch include:

- The Sun Ray and Henscratch properties, part of the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission,
- St. Lucie Airport property surveyed by volunteers with team leader Eva Ries, and
- Southwest Florida Water Management District's Coker Prairie Reserve in Manatee County, surveyed by volunteers with team leader Kay Prophet.

Hurricane Irma passed through the center of the Florida peninsula leaving floodwaters standing and scrub oak trees stripped of acorns during the time period when Scrub-Jays are harvesting and caching this winter food supply. Many of the usually stable populations and productive sites for juvenile Scrub-Jays in south-central Florida showed poorer adult survival and lower breeding success than in the previous year. In the north-central and coastal areas, Scrub-Jay breeding success was generally much better than in those areas hardest hit by Hurricane Irma.

The sad news to report is that Florida Scrub-Jays appear to be extirpated in Palm Beach County. Audubon scientists believe the combination of intensive urbanization, less available scrub habitat, and inability to use prescribed fire in an urban setting are to blame. The last known breeding pair of Scrub-Jays was sighted at Jupiter Ridge Natural Area in 2016. Only one Scrub-Jay was sighted there in 2017 and none were found in 2018 despite repeated searches.

Overall, the population of this Threatened species appears stable. Excitingly, several Jay Watch sites saw significant increases in jays, especially those with strong habitat management. What we know is that habitat management and restoration pays off. The science and data collected by Audubon Jay Watch community scientists continues to be important to Audubon as we advocate for land conservation and protecting the places jays need.

Making a Difference: Habitat Restoration Continues to Show Promise as Scrub-Jays Rebound

Biologist Laurie Dolan began managing the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenways Triangle in 2000, when the site had about 200 habitable acres of scrub for the eight or so resident Florida Scrub-Jays. In 2004, Laurie and other staff restored an additional 400 acres of overgrown scrub. The restored habitat showed great promise for the jays, but would they rebound?

True to their name, Florida Scrub-Jays thrive in sandy, scrub habitat. By 2008, when Jay Watch began surveying "the Triangle," more jays were found! Jay Watchers eagerly reported 31 Scrub-Jays in nine family groups. Land managers restored another 300 acres in 2011, bringing the total to 900 acres of suitable habitat. The jays continued responding positively, and Jay Watchers reported 55 Scrub-Jays in 15 families. The most recent restoration in 2015 brought the total suitable habitat to a whopping 1,200 acres. Excitingly, the 2018 Jay Watch survey estimated there are now 29 groups of Scrub-Jays totaling over 100 individual birds, 28 of which were juveniles hatched in spring 2018 – a banner year for this beautiful Florida bird.

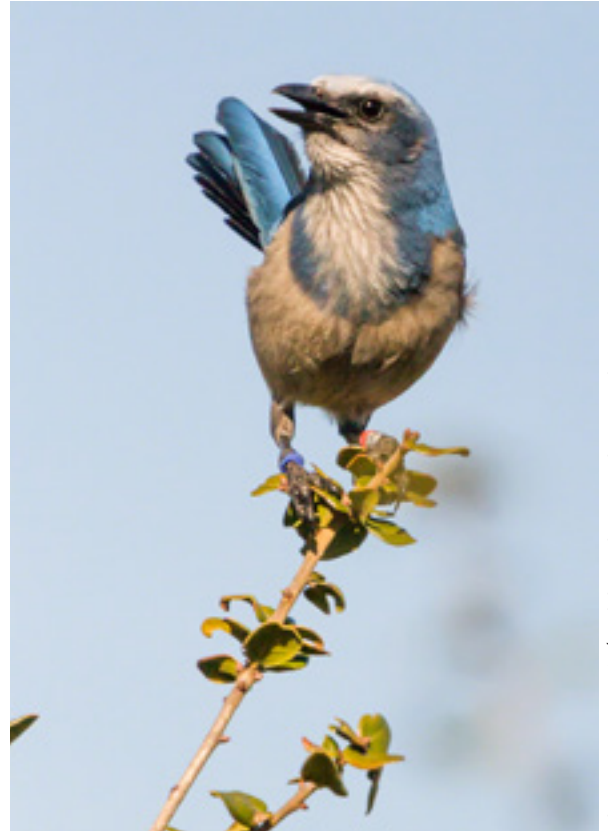


Photo: Dawn Currie/Audubon Photography Awards



One of the many Florida Scrub-Jays at Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenways Triangle. Photo: Brinda Curran

How 3,800 Fewer Pines Actually Helps the Rare Florida Scrub-Jay

In December and January, 30 Audubon Jay Watchers and FWC Ridge Rangers restored prime scrub habitat between two Florida Scrub-Jay families by cutting down thick stands of intruding sand pines at Henscratch Preserve. While this might seem like a traitorous move by birders, in this case, it's helpful to the rare, inquisitive bird. Sand pines provide safe harbor for predators such as Cooper's Hawks that endanger juvenile and adult Scrub-Jays. The hard work by the Jay Watchers and Ridge Rangers helped restore 21 acres and eliminated nearly 3,800 sand pines. Ultimately, removing sand pines at Henscratch Preserve allows the two adjacent families to expand their territories and may even provide a new territory for juveniles raised by these jay families. The downed sand pines are left in place to dry out and later provide helpful fuel for a prescribed burn. Once again, helpful to the jays, burns expose bare sand - a favorite hiding spot for Scrub-Jays to bury acorns for their winter food supply when insects are scarce.

Audubon partners with land managers and state agencies to protect and support many Florida Scrub-Jay families like these while working statewide to promote land conservation and protect Florida's special places. The state's diversity of ecosystems include the important scrub habitat, which occurs mostly as isolated pockets in Central Florida and a few large tracts including Ocala National Forest and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Florida Scrub-Jays rarely wander away from their own little patch of scrub, making them extremely sedentary and unlikely to successfully relocate if habitat disappears. With exploding growth in Florida's population and available scrub habitat dwindling, it is critical that the places where jays are found are appropriately managed. With the help of Audubon members, volunteers, supporters, and partners, Audubon Jay Watch protects and monitors this species and the habitat they depend on.



Jay Watcher and Ridge Ranger Susan Volpitta hard at work downing sand pines to help Florida Scrub-Jays.



Downed sand pines add helpful fuel to prescribed burns that restore vital scrub habitat.

Florida Scrub-Jays Warm Hearts of All Ages

The Florida Scrub-Jay is an incredibly endearing species, attracting both young and young-at-heart to Audubon Jay Watch. Ann Hannon discovered Jay Watch through her local Audubon chapter three years ago. Her boundless energy and enthusiasm are reflected in both the field doing surveys and at the numerous events where she signs up new Jay Watchers! Last year, Ann celebrated her 90th birthday.

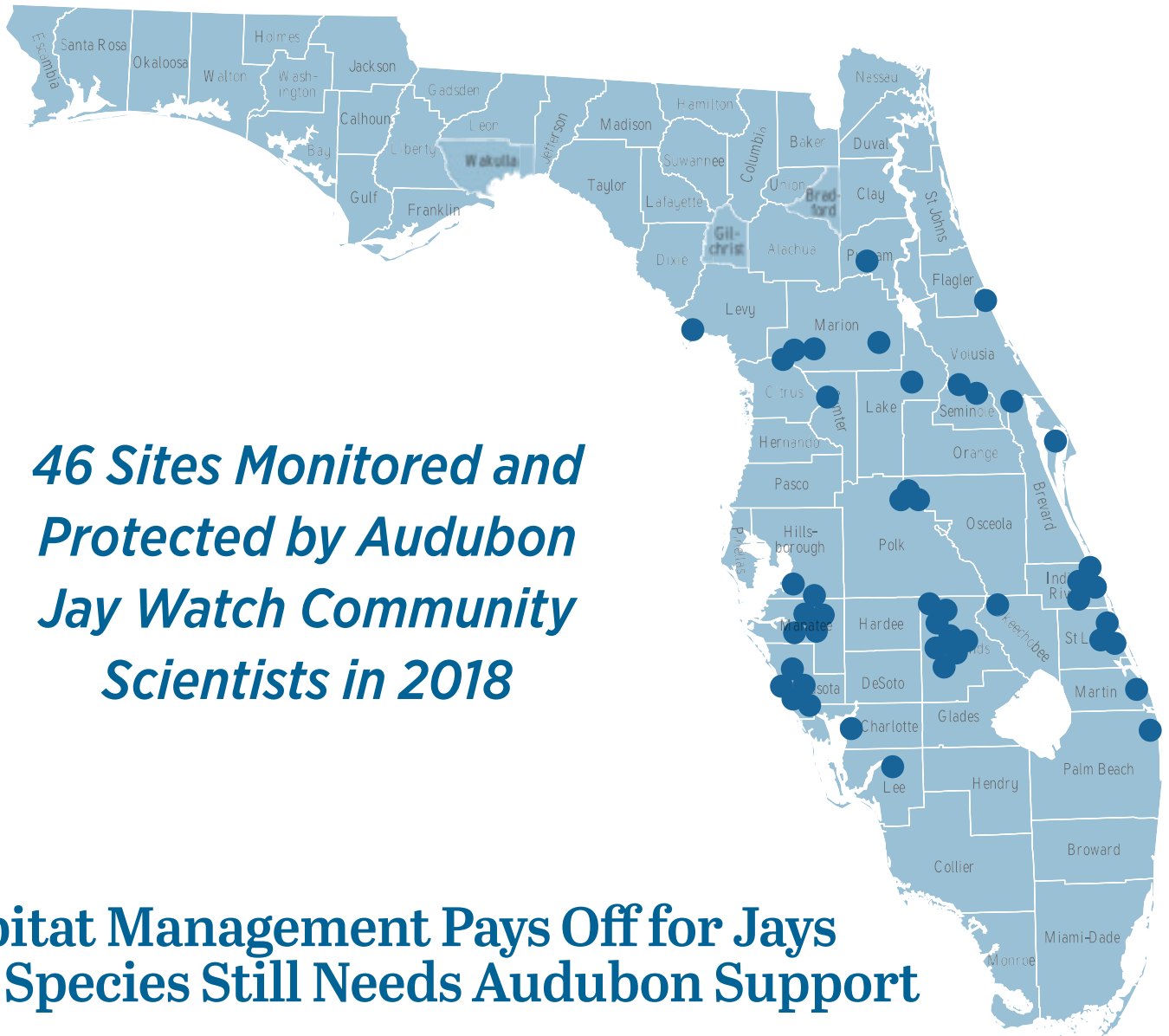
Mia Keriases fell in love with the Florida Scrub-Jays during an internship with Dr. Reed Bowman at Archbold Biological Station. Dr. Bowman told her about Jay Watch, and she has been volunteering ever since. This coming summer will be Mia's third year in Jay Watch. Mia, now 16, is driven by her passion for the birds, love for the environment, and desire to protect them both. It's no surprise that the Scrub-Jays, a species that thrives in cooperative family groups, brings together volunteers of all ages for this important work.



With 74 years between them, Ann Hannon (left) and Mia Keriases (right) serve as reminders that no one is too young or too old to care for Florida's wildlife. Photo: Vince Lamb



Monitoring and Protecting Florida Scrub-Jays Throughout the Sunshine State

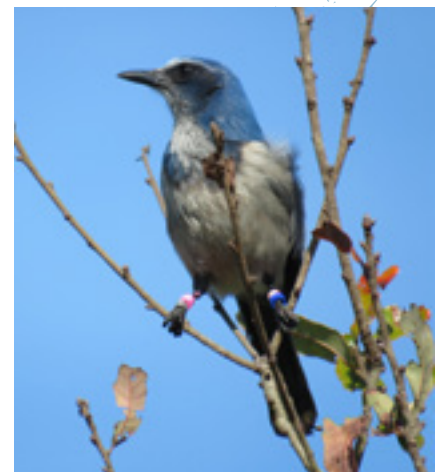


Habitat Management Pays Off for Jays but Species Still Needs Audubon Support

The Florida Scrub-Jay remains a priority species for Audubon. Jay Watch data gives us reason for hope and reason to remain vigilant for the beloved jays. At six Audubon-monitored sites, the jays experienced significant increases in population over the past 10 years. Seven sites report steady populations with about the same number of Scrub-Jays as they had a decade ago. Unfortunately, 17 sites have seen decreases of more than 20 percent. Audubon scientists report that aggressive and consistent scrub habitat management, including both prescribed fire and mechanical oak-and-pine restoration treatments, made a significant difference at the six sites reporting significant increases.

Kudos to the land managers of these six sites whose diligent habitat management resulted in jay increases observed this year!

- Edward W. Chance Gilley Creek Reserve – Manatee County
- Highlands Hammock State Park – Highlands County
- Jonathan Dickinson State Park – Martin County
- Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenways Triangle – Marion County
- Moody Branch Mitigation Area – Manatee County
- Savannas Preserve State Park – St. Lucie County



Florida Scrub-Jay at Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenways Triangle. Photo: Brinda Curran

Empowering Community Scientists, Audubon Partnership Expands Jay Watch Advanced Training

In 2018, Audubon partnered with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) research biologists working on Florida Scrub-Jay translocations to offer a whole new approach to our advanced Jay Watch training. New Jay Watch volunteers attend a half-day training with Audubon staff and chapter leaders, but thanks to a special partnership with FWC, more advanced Jay Watch volunteers received an intensive, additional half day of training with experts from Audubon and FWC. The advanced training included hands-on experience collecting data with GPS units, maps, and data sheets as well as interactive expert instruction. Through trainings like this, community scientists gain new skills and provide even more valuable data on Florida's inquisitive Florida Scrub-Jay.



Thanks to Audubon partnerships, Jay Watch community scientists attended one of the most rigorous and advanced Jay Watch trainings ever in 2018. Audubon community scientists are everyday people who collect important data used to guide management and conservation decisions.

Special Thanks to the 2018 Jay Watch Major Supporters

Batchelor Foundation • The Walt Disney Company • Mosaic Company Foundation • Florida Power & Light

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Halifax River Audubon
Hendry-Glades Audubon
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Manatee County Audubon

Marion Audubon
Audubon of Martin County
Orange Audubon
Peace River Audubon
Pelican Island Audubon
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