

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WYOMING SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 221

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Subject: SCRUB JAY*

General

The scrub jay (Aphelocoma coerulescens) is a common resident of scrub oak covered hillsides in the eastern foothills of Colorado and in sage, serviceberry, or pinyon in the west and southern half of the state.

In New Mexico, the scrub jay is widely distributed among pinyons, junipers, and scrub oaks or the Upper Sonoran Zone.

The scrub jay is an irregular visitant in southern Wyoming. This jay is common at elevations of 3,000 to 7,500 feet (914-2,286 m).

Food Requirements

Scrub jays are omnivorous with consumption of animal and vegetable matter varying seasonally. Vegetable matter comprised about 73 percent of the total diet in California and included wild and cultivated grains, fruit, and mast (acorns). Consumption of grain was highest in March, while fruit consumption was greatest from May through August. Mast comprised the bulk of the total diet from October through February. Mast comprised 38 percent of the diet, while 22 percent of the diet consisted of fruit, and 12 percent consisted of grain.



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*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

Animal matter made up the remaining 27 percent of the total diet in California and included beetles, wasps, ants, bees, butterfly and moth larvae, grasshoppers, and crickets. Spiders, snails, mice, shrews, snakes, frogs, lizards, birds and their eggs were consumed less frequently. Consumption of beetles was greatest in April and comprised 31 percent of the total diet, while grasshoppers and crickets were eaten in July, August, and September.

Water Requirements

The scrub jay usually nests near cold, clear water, which is used primarily for bathing.

Cover Requirements

The scrub jay in western Colorado is found in gulches on open hillsides which are heavily covered with scrub oaks, serviceberry, and pinyon pine. During winter months, these jays are found in brush covered gulches and ravines in the lower portion of their range and usually not far from cultivated ground, barnyards, feedlots, and fields.

Reproductive Requirements

During the breeding season, the scrub jay shows a preference for areas interspersed with openings and for borders of brushy ravines and wooded creek bottoms. Scrub jays build their nests in dense low vegetation comprised of oaks, junipers, or pinyon. Nests in California were placed in low bushes or thickets seldom more than 10 ft (3 m) from the ground. Nests were usually constructed close to cold, clear water. One study found that nest height in Florida scrub jays was related to the average height of woody vegetation in the area of the nest.

Special Habitat Requirements

Male scrub jays sing from prominent perches during the breeding season.

Interspersion Requirements

The territory of the scrub jay is approximately 30 acres (12.1 ha) in size.

Special Considerations

As soon as young jays can fly, large numbers of these birds ascend a few thousand feet into heavier timbered country, apparently in search of insects. Climatic conditions have little effect on movements of scrub jays; food supply alone is responsible for the migratory movements of this species.