



Audubon FLORIDA



Photo by Steven Freedman



**JAY
WATCH**
A CITIZEN-SCIENCE PROGRAM

**2014
Annual Report**

Jay Watch: Making a Difference for Florida Scrub-Jays

We celebrate the dedicated work of Jay Watch citizen scientists and a cadre of scrub site managers in the following pages of our annual report featuring volunteers, Florida Scrub-Jays, and ongoing habitat restoration highlights.

Why Scrub-Jays?



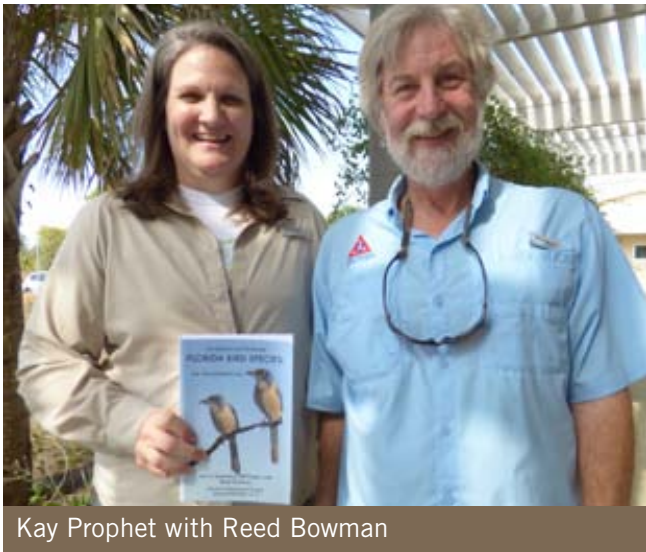
The Florida Scrub-Jay is our state's only endemic bird species, found nowhere else in the world. It was listed as federally Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the Endangered Species Act in 1987, largely due to loss of its scrub and scrubby flatwoods habitat and decades of fire suppression that allowed the scrub to become overgrown and unsuitable for Scrub-Jays.

Data collected by Jay Watch volunteers is essential to inform land management decisions about where and when to apply prescribed fire, without which, Scrub-Jays disappear.

Jay Watch Volunteer of the Year

Each year as Audubon's Jay Watch Coordinator, I have the opportunity to meet new volunteer-friends and to renew friendships with others around the state. I treasure this time communing with all of you who care so deeply about Florida Scrub-Jays and their special habitat and with the many site managers who daily devote their expertise to restoring Florida scrub for the benefit of the jays and so many other rare plants and animals.

As I pored through data sheets this summer, analyzing maps and survey data, I was pleased to see so many people surveyed on multiple dates at the same site and how many people surveyed jays at more than one site. One name stood out, appearing on 14 survey dates at a total of 10 different properties in Manatee, Sarasota, Polk, and Highlands counties: Kathy ("Kay") Prophet. After a three-year lapse in Jay Watching, Kay returned to the program this season and made the most of it! Congratulations to the Jay Watch Volunteer of the Year!



Kay Prophet with Reed Bowman

Photo by Jacquie Sulek

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Marianne Korosy, Ph.D.
Jay Watch Coordinator
Audubon Florida
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*In 2014
281 volunteers
contributed 2677 hours
to survey Florida Scrub-Jays
at 43 sites in 17 counties*



is now on Facebook!

Share your favorite Scrub-Jay or scrub habitat photos, stories about Florida Scrub-Jays, ask questions, and find out the latest on Jay Watch trainings, surveys, and restoration projects on the new-in-2014 Audubon Jay Watch group page in Facebook.

*Join the fun today at:
[facebook.com/groups/AudubonJayWatch](https://www.facebook.com/groups/AudubonJayWatch)*



Celebrating our 2014 Volunteers!

The success of the Jay Watch program under Audubon's leadership, and the program's contributions to recovery of Florida Scrub-Jay populations statewide, depends upon dedicated volunteer citizen scientists. The number of volunteers has grown considerably since 2002 when The Nature Conservancy and Archbold Biological Station began the program with 55 volunteers surveying 11 properties in Polk and Highlands counties. In 2014, 281 volunteers invested 2,677 hours sharpening their skills in onsite trainings and performing field surveys at 43 sites in 17 counties across the Florida peninsula. Audubon works to extend the reach of Jay Watch each year.

*Talk to your friends and family
and invite them to a 2015 training or survey.
Help us grow the number of Jay Watch citizen scientists!*

Jay Watch annual volunteer celebration, Archbold Biological Station.



Photo by Milton Heiberg



VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS

Charismatic Florida Scrub-Jays keep volunteers engaged in conservation

Joe Carroll began observing Florida Scrub-Jays back in 1997 while working as a private consultant. In 2006 he discovered that Jay Watch scientists had worked out a methodology for surveying Florida Scrub-Jays on public lands. Joe modified his survey techniques and continued to do annual surveys. Audubon Florida has brought new life to the Jay Watch program and benefits from the knowledge of a 17-year veteran like Joe. When asked why he continues to remain engaged Joe said, “Jays are amazing creatures and anyone who gets involved with them just falls in love. You stand there and watch them and they watch you”.



Joe Carroll



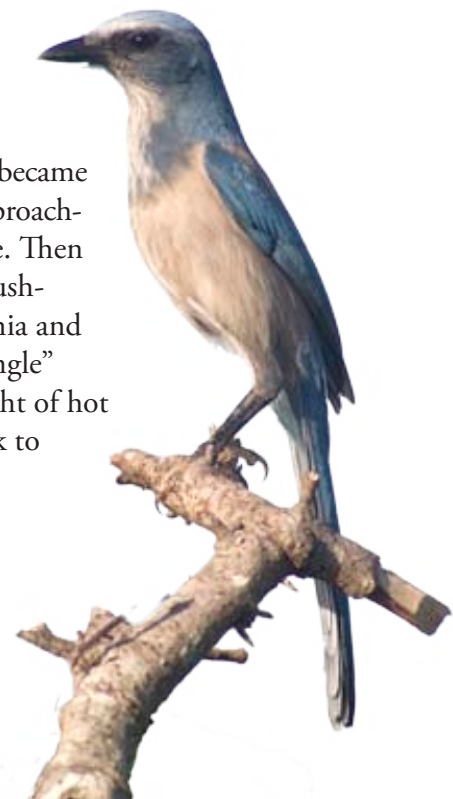
(Left to right) Alexis Cardas, Jess Rodriguez (FWC), Brinda Curran, Ashley Dolan, Laurie Dolan and Virginia Hall.

Building a science portfolio

Alexis Cardas, a student at University of Florida, began volunteering with Jess Rodriguez of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission just last year. A quick study and devoted volunteer, she quickly became an integral part of the Jay Watch program. She helped with pre-breeding surveys marking points for the summer’s volunteers. She led survey teams at both the Cross Florida Greenway and a private property in Lake County and coordinated three surveys at Ross Prairie State Forest. Alexis continues to expand her involvement in Jay Watch, working toward a career in conservation.

Two much fun!

Shortly after relocating to Florida, Virginia Hall and Brinda Curran (photo, above left) became fast friends. They attended Audubon’s Jay Watch training and embarked on surveys, approaching each location as a new adventure. First they surveyed at Halpata-Tastanki Preserve. Then they moved their camper to Ross Prairie State Forest for three days of crawling and bush-whacking through overgrown scrub that would discourage most folks - but not Virginia and Brinda. And to cap off the season they next moved to Cross Florida Greenways “Triangle” property and surveyed four days back-to-back! Their enthusiasm and humor made light of hot and sweaty work for all of their survey team members and rumor has it they’ll be back to join us next season!



Conservation Leaders in the Making

Melissa Solomon is a relative newcomer to Audubon's Jay Watch Program. After attending basic training in 2013 she jumped right in to survey and returned in 2014 to help survey at sites in Highlands and Polk counties. Currently a student at University of Tampa, Melissa is pursuing her love for conservation and building her leadership skills into a career. "No other environmental group in Florida has a program that appeals to and benefits young people like the Jay Watch program," shared Melissa. At the recent Jay Watch volunteer celebration she had a chance to meet Sharon Ballentine, also a student at the University of Tampa, who traveled with Tampa Audubon members Cheryl Merz and Nancy Murrah to the Jay Watch volunteer appreciation event held this year at Archbold Biological Station. She is looking forward to spring training and doing her first Jay Watch surveys. Citizen science opportunities for young adults are instrumental in developing our conservation leaders for the future.



Melissa Solomon and Sharon Ballentine at the 2014 Jay Watch Appreciation event at Archbold Biological Station

Did you know?

Brightest are Best

The plumage of Florida Scrub-Jays reflects ultraviolet (UV) light so that males and females look different to each other, but not to us. The color of Scrub-Jays is also associated with body condition and social status among juvenile birds and dull-colored birds avoid fighting with bright-colored birds.

Acorn Discrimination Skills

Florida Scrub-Jays can tell the difference between acorns that have higher or lower tannin content. For you plant-o-philes, red oaks such as myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*) and sandhill oak (*Q. inopina*) have higher tannin concentration while sand live oak (*Q. geminata*) and Chapman oak (*Q. chapmanii*) have lower tannin concentrations. Higher tannin concentrations interfere with the metabolism of protein so it's important for jays to be able to tell the difference. When harvesting scrub oak acorns in the fall months, jays tend to eat the acorns with lower tannin concentration and cache, or bury, the acorns with higher tannin concentration. Tannins leach out of the cached acorns as rain water percolates through the sand so as time passes, the cached acorns are healthier for Scrub-Jays to eat!



Photo by Reinier Munguia





Hálpata Tasthanaki Preserve, Marion



Royce Ranch - LWRWMA



Cross Florida Greenways



Catfish Creek State Park

Photo by Reinier Munguia



Duette Preserve

Photo by Billie Knight




Lake Marion Creek WMA



Fred Hunter - private property

DA



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← You!



Indrio Savannahs Preserve



Prairie/Shell Creek Preserve

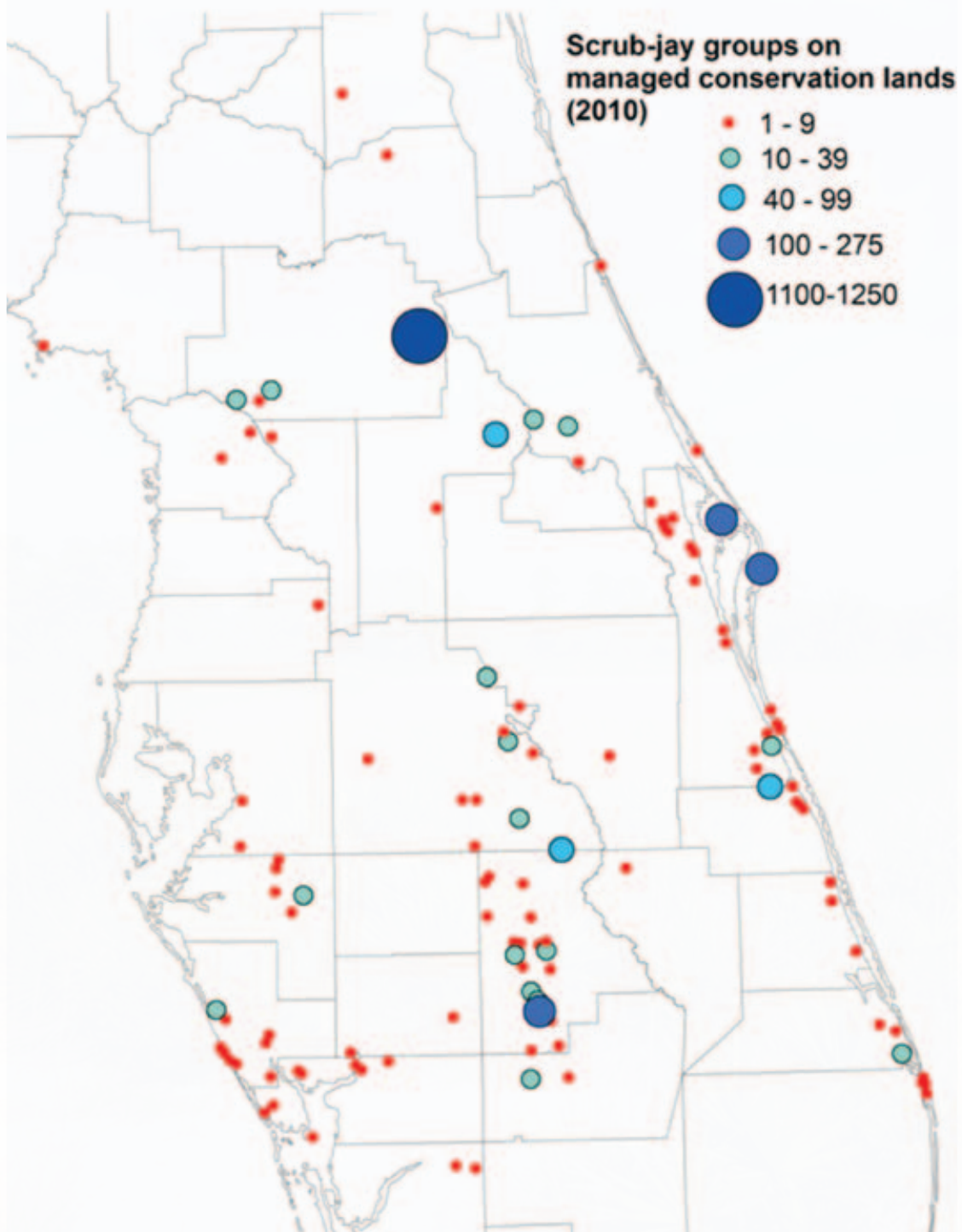
Photo by Bob MacMonigle



Canaveral National Seashore

Photo by Vince Lamb

Where are Florida's Scrub-Jays?



Scrub-Jay sites differ from Gulf Coast to Atlantic Coast and coastal scrub sites differ from those on the Lake Wales Ridge. Doing Jay Watch surveys at several different sites gives you a chance to see how Scrub-Jays, habitat, and land management vary. In 2015 we challenge you to broaden your "life list" of Jay Watch sites surveyed!

Map by Craig Faulhaber, FWC.



Celebrating Prescribed Fire Successes in 2014

Photos by Florida Park Service



2014 prescribed burns at Jonathan Dickinson State Park, bordering U.S. Highway 1 in Martin County (above) and Lake June-in-Winter State Park in Highlands County (right).

Data collected by Jay Watch volunteers helps land managers prioritize and time prescribed fires critical for Scrub-Jay survival. Professional burn teams restored hundreds of acres of scrub habitat in 2014 at Florida parks, water management district and FWC wildlife management area properties. Prescribed fires leave a landscape that looks rather barren initially (photo lower left). Within 3-4 years after fire, burned habitat becomes an optimum mix of acorn-bearing oaks and bare sand patches supporting Florida Scrub-Jays (photo lower right). Congratulations to the fire teams of Jonathan Dickinson State Park and Lake June-in-Winter State Park for managing burns in 2014 at two parks vitally important to recovery of Florida Scrub-Jays.

Photo by Florida Park Service



Photo by Marianne Korosy

Thank You!





We all know the frustration of having so-called “friendly” Florida Scrub-Jays shun you during a field survey when it’s important to get an accurate count and age of group members. We’ve all wondered why the cooperative breeding jays that we have to survey are being so dang uncooperative. But with a few years of research under our belt and a working familiarity with the current scientific literature, I think we can calm your wondering. Can’t make it any easier to survey those birds, but we can assure you it’s not your fault.

“Like people, scrub-jays have different personalities... from bold and exploratory to timid and fearful.”

Like people, scrub-jays have different personalities and they are especially distinct along a behavioral axis from bold and exploratory to timid and fearful. And of course, like any good psychologist can tell you, it’s all about their mother. When scrub-jay moms disappear from the sight of their nestlings, it causes the kids to stress out – Mom may be out getting their food, but it doesn’t matter to a kid. For all they know Mom has abandoned them, skipped town, leaving them to fend for themselves. Early developmental stress turns on those personality types...lots leads to fearful kids, less of it leads to bolder ones.

Of course, in overgrown habitat, even on short trips away from the nest, Mom disappears from sight pretty quick, just because the habitat is so thick. Thus we expect young jays raised in overgrown habitat to be more fearful than those raised in more open, better quality habitat. Considering the increased risks of predation in overgrown habitat, this isn’t a bad thing. Fearful jays invest more time in vigilance than bolder jays, thus they may be able to detect and evade a predator faster than their bold buddies. But they’ve also got to eat, right? Birds have to balance the time invested in foraging versus vigilance and once they’ve had enough to eat, they are going to spend their time watching for predators and ensuring their own safety.

Most visitors to Archbold are struck by the low and open habitat. We’ve been using fire to manage our scrub for decades. At many of the sites where Jay Watch volunteers survey for jays, fire is a more recent tool. In some places the habitat is still overgrown or somewhere in the process of being restored – still tall and thick. Jays at these sites are more fearful. They are less likely to fly over to check out your taped playback because it carries the risk of getting killed along the way. So they sit and watch. Fear can be a powerful emotion – both for us and for them. But despite this, the quality of our Jay Watch data doesn’t seem to vary with the quality of a site. We get accurate data, no matter how tall the vegetation. It’s hard to do, but Jay Watch volunteers are well trained and persevere... and that is part of the reason why these data are so valuable. Keep at it, but when it’s difficult, remember the scaredy-jays!

Reed Bowman, Ph.D.
Avian Ecology Research Director
Archbold Biological Station



Jay Watch Trainings—2014

The number of citizen scientists trained in Jay Watch mapping and survey protocol continues to climb statewide, from 103 in 2012 to 119 in 2013 and 131 in 2014. New trainees add their efforts to the hundreds of citizen scientists trained in years past, many of whom continue involvement with Jay Watch from year to year. In addition, new and seasoned land managers and biologists that will coordinate volunteer teams attend Jay Watch trainings annually.

Seven Jay Watch trainings were held in seven counties in 2014: Charlotte, Manatee, Marion, Volusia, Martin, Polk, and Highlands counties. Two new venues hosted trainings – Prairie Shell Creek Preserve in Charlotte County, hosted by Southwest Florida Water Management District’s Stephanie Green, and the Royce Ranch unit of FWC’s Lake Wales Wildlife Management Area, hosted by Bill Parken of Ridge Rangers’ fame.

Building on Audubon’s success with our first advanced Jay Watch training in 2013, Seminole State Forest was the venue for the 2014 advanced training, attended by 26 experienced volunteers and land managers. Ralph Risch, the humorous and knowledgeable Scrub-Jay Biologist for Seminole State Forest, led the instruction team which included Craig Faulhaber and Dr. Karl Miller from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The advanced trainings are designed to increase knowledge of Scrub-Jay behavior traits that are especially useful in distinguishing group membership where multiple groups interact along shared territory boundaries.

In addition to Ralph Risch and Seminole State Forest, a big thanks goes to all Jay Watch partners who provided site access and co-taught onsite Jay Watch trainings: Florida Department of Environmental Protection Office of Greenways and Trails and the Florida Park Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Future Farmers of America, Manatee County Natural Resources Department, Southwest Florida Water Management District, and Volusia County Environmental Lands Department.

2014 Advanced Training participants at Bear Lake, Seminole State Forest. Instructor Ralph Risch at top.



Photo by Jacqui Sulek



Special Thanks to 2014 Jay Watch Donors

Batchelor Foundation

Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund

State Wildlife Grant awarded by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Jay Watch Partner Organizations

Archbold Biological Station

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Florida Forest Service

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Hillsborough County

Indian River County

Manatee County

Polk County

Sarasota County

South Florida Water Management District

Southwest Florida Water Management District

St. Johns River Water Management District

St. Lucie County

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

U.S. National Park Service

Volusia County

Audubon Chapters with Jay Watch participants

Audubon Society of the Everglades
Citrus Audubon Society
Eagle Audubon Society
Flagler Audubon Society
Four Rivers Audubon Society
Halifax River Audubon Society
Highlands County Audubon Lake
Region Audubon Society
Manatee County Audubon Society
Marion Audubon Society
Audubon of Martin County
Orange Audubon Society
Peace River Audubon
Pelican Island Audubon
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

How to Participate in Jay Watch

Find a training

Jay Watch surveys run mid-June through July, with volunteer trainings held prior to the surveys in May and early June. For training information or to sign up for the Jay Watch e-newsletter, contact: Jacqui Sulek jsulek@audubon.org

Sign up for surveys

To join surveys or for data inquiries contact:
Marianne Korosy mkorosy@audubon.org

More information

<http://fl.audubon.org/jay-watch>

Join Jay Watch

Email Audubon's Jacqui Sulek -
jsulek@audubon.org

Donate

<http://audubonbootson.org/jaywatch.html>

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