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### **Cooperative Conservation Effort Gives Florida Scrub Jay Family A Forever Home**

Recently, conservation specialists at Brevard Zoo teamed up with officials from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the St. John's River Water Management District to translocate a family of four Florida scrub jays out of the path of development and to a safer, permanent home on protected lands at the Buck Lake Conservation Area in Mims.

Florida scrub jays, easily recognizable by their bright blue feathers, are a federally protected bird species that lives only within the state of Florida in scrub habitat, a sandy, fire-dependent upland ecosystem that's disappearing at an alarming rate due to development and fire suppression.

"They're a really unique species of bird in that they're extremely charismatic and social," explained Jody Palmer, Brevard Zoo's Assistant Director of Conservation. "And, as our state's only endemic bird, they perform some really valuable specific ecosystem functions too, such as caching scrub oak acorns."

The birds translocated by Brevard Zoo and partners were found in Port St. John, living on an unsuitably small sliver of land owned by local utility provider Florida Power & Light (FPL) that is soon to be surrounded by a sea of new development. To save the birds, FPL provided Brevard Zoo staff with access to the site starting in November 2014. Team members visited the Florida scrub jays three times a week prior to the translocation in order to train them to be safely captured and transported as a family unit in small enclosures.

Florida scrub jay families work together to guard the family territory and help raise young. Keeping all members of a family together is crucial to ensuring survival in a new home. On the day of the translocation, January 9, the capture of the birds went smoothly. With help from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the entire Florida scrub jay family was outfitted with colored

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bands to help wildlife managers identify them in the future. The birds were then moved to an overnight holding enclosure at the Buck Lake Conservation Area, an expansive stretch of protected scrub habitat managed by the St. Johns River Water Management District.

The following day, the scrub jays were released into their beautiful new home. From now on, they will be monitored regularly to ensure that they are adjusting and thriving. All data collected during monitoring will be relayed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state agencies that track bird movements, reproduction and family alliances to help ensure survival of the species.

There are believed to be only a few thousand Florida scrub jay families left in the wild. The four birds saved this January through inter-agency and corporate cooperation along with the hard work of Brevard Zoo staff goes aa long way toward sustaining the genetic viability of Central Florida's prized Florida scrub jay population for generations to come.

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*Brevard Zoo is a not-for-profit organization and a leader in wildlife conservation and education. Florida scrub jay monitoring and translocation is just one of the Zoo's many local conservation programs, which also include pollinator monitoring, Perdido Key beach mice captive breeding and reintroduction program, diamondback terrapin monitoring, and restoration efforts on the Indian River Lagoon that include the Brevard Oyster Restoration project. For more on the Zoo's local conservation programs, visit [www.BrevardZoo.org/Conservation/Local](http://www.BrevardZoo.org/Conservation/Local).*