

Hello Viera Residents! As the Florida Scrub Jay Research Coordinator for Brevard Zoo I wanted to provide information on a unique gem in your own backyard and the rare bird that calls it home.

Florida Scrub Jays are a blue and gray crestless bird that lacks the black and white markings on the head, wings, and tail of the more common blue jay. They are the only species of bird endemic or unique to the state of Florida where it occurs in patches of low-growing scrub oak in sandy soils. They are one of only 15 species endemic to the continental United States. To make them even more special they are one of the few cooperative breeding birds in North America. Due to their social nature Florida Scrub Jays cooperate by forming extended family groups: the young from previous years help their parents guard nest sites, raise young and fight off predators until they can get a territory of their own.

Extensive development and habitat fragmentation in Florida threaten this bird's already small population. Community members need to take pride in that Viera East has done incredible work over the years with their Scrub Jay Preserve, the remaining scrub habitat between Viera and Barnes Boulevard. Brevard Zoo was solicited by a local ecologist, Dr. David Breininger, to monitor the property in 2008. Over the past ten years valuable demographic information has been collected by Zoo staff and volunteers in Brevard County and shared with land management companies and Florida Scrub Jay stakeholders in order to make more informed decisions in terms of managing scrub to its fullest potential and promoting an increase in the jay population.

Brevard Zoo helps trap tame the Florida Scrub Jays utilizing a tailor made device. The jays are prepared for capture where they are banded and receive a veterinary exam. In the winter of 218 a Zoo team was hard at work with Dr. David Breininger to band as many jays as possible. Between Viera East and the Cruickshank Sanctuary managed by the Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) Program Zoo staff helped band and collect genetic material for a grant funded research project a total of 59 Florida Scrub Jays, of which 29 reside in Viera. If you look close you will notice that your jay neighbors may be sporting colored bands and an official federal silver band with assigned numbers. When a jay is banded the information is shared with the federal government and entered into a database.

The preserve design and management has been successful at supporting utilization and nesting onsite by a large number of listed and non-listed wildlife species including nesting eagles and Sandhill cranes. Viera East has a specific Florida Scrub Jay management component which has resulted in the utilization of more than 20 confirmed families of Florida Scrub Jays using the site today. Thriving scrub habitat and jay populations are dependent on lightning-ignited or controlled burns to prevent the oak-scrub community from becoming too dense and tall.

Brevard Zoo has committed resources since 2006 to ensure Florida Scrub Jay populations remain in Brevard County. There is much to learn about this bold and curious bird and the specialized habitat it requires to survive. If you see me or a trained jay volunteer wandering around Viera scrub habitat with our clipboard and binoculars please feel free to stop us and ask questions. You may not want to interrupt the busy work of the Florida Scrub Jay in the fall and winter, each jay is busy caching, or burying, up to 8,000 scrub oak acorns in sandy openings throughout their

territory. Let the jays work for you to keep oak populations healthy and pest populations under control!

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Florida Scrub Jays –

- listed as threatened by the federal government
 - extensive development and habitat fragmentation in Florida threaten the jay's already small population
- blue and gray crestless bird lacking the black and white markings of the more common blue jay
- the only species of bird endemic or unique to the state of Florida where it occurs in patches of low-growing scrub oak in sandy soils
- one of only 15 species endemic to the continental United States
- one of the few cooperative breeding birds in North America
 - due to their social nature Florida Scrub Jays cooperate by forming extended family groups: the young from previous years help their parents guard nest sites, raise young and fight off predators until they can get a territory of their own.
- diet consists of insects, frogs, toads, lizards, mice, bird eggs, and acorns

Viera East, Scrub Jay Preserve -

- community members need to take pride in that Viera East has done incredible work over the years with the Preserve, the remaining scrub habitat between Viera and Barnes Boulevard
- Brevard Zoo was solicited by a local ecologist, Dr. David Breininger, to monitor the property in 2008
- over the past ten years valuable demographic information has been collected by Zoo staff and volunteers in Brevard County and shared with land management companies and Florida Scrub Jay stakeholders in order to make more informed decisions in terms of managing scrub to its fullest potential and promoting an increase in the jay population
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Brevard Zoo –

- helps trap tame the Florida Scrub Jays utilizing a tailor made device
- jays are prepared for capture where they are banded and receive a veterinary exam
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