



Fact Sheet

Florida scrub-jay disease and mortality

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- There was a period of elevated scrub-jay mortality on the Lake Wales Ridge from July to October 2008.
- The period of mortality was correlated with elevated rainfall and mosquito abundance and had the greatest impact on young birds and very old birds, suggesting a possible mosquito-borne disease.
- Biologists at Archbold Biological Station have collected blood samples from scrub-jays and mosquitoes in an attempt to isolate live virus and/or antibodies to identify the specific disease agent.
- Suspected disease-related mortality events have occurred approximately once per decade in the Archbold Biological Station scrub-jay population since the birds have been studied, including a particularly severe event in 1979-1980.
- The most recent event seems to have been limited to the Lake Wales Ridge.
- The 1979-1980 event coincided with an outbreak of Eastern equine encephalitis in domestic birds.
- The arrival of West Nile Virus in Florida in 2001 caused great concern. Antibody screening suggests that as many as 10 percent of scrub-jays may have been exposed to the virus and survived, thus carrying the antibodies; however, the mortality rate following exposure is unknown. To date, no scrub-jay population declines have been attributed to West Nile Virus.

Scrub-jay fast facts

- The FWC lists the Florida scrub-jay as a threatened species.
- The Florida scrub-jay is a 12-inch long, blue and gray crestless jay.
- Its habitat is restricted to scattered, often small and isolated patches of sand pine scrub, xeric oak scrub and scrubby flatwoods in peninsular Florida.
- Florida scrub-jays mate for life. The breeding season is relatively short from March to June.
- Habitat management consists of periodically burning areas of scrub tracts to maintain the desired habitat for Florida scrub-jays.
- Biologists in several regions in Florida are currently studying scrub-jays. They are marking each bird being studied with a unique set of colored plastic and aluminum leg bands. These studies will provide information on territory size, habits and other data necessary for conservation of scrub-jays and their environment.

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