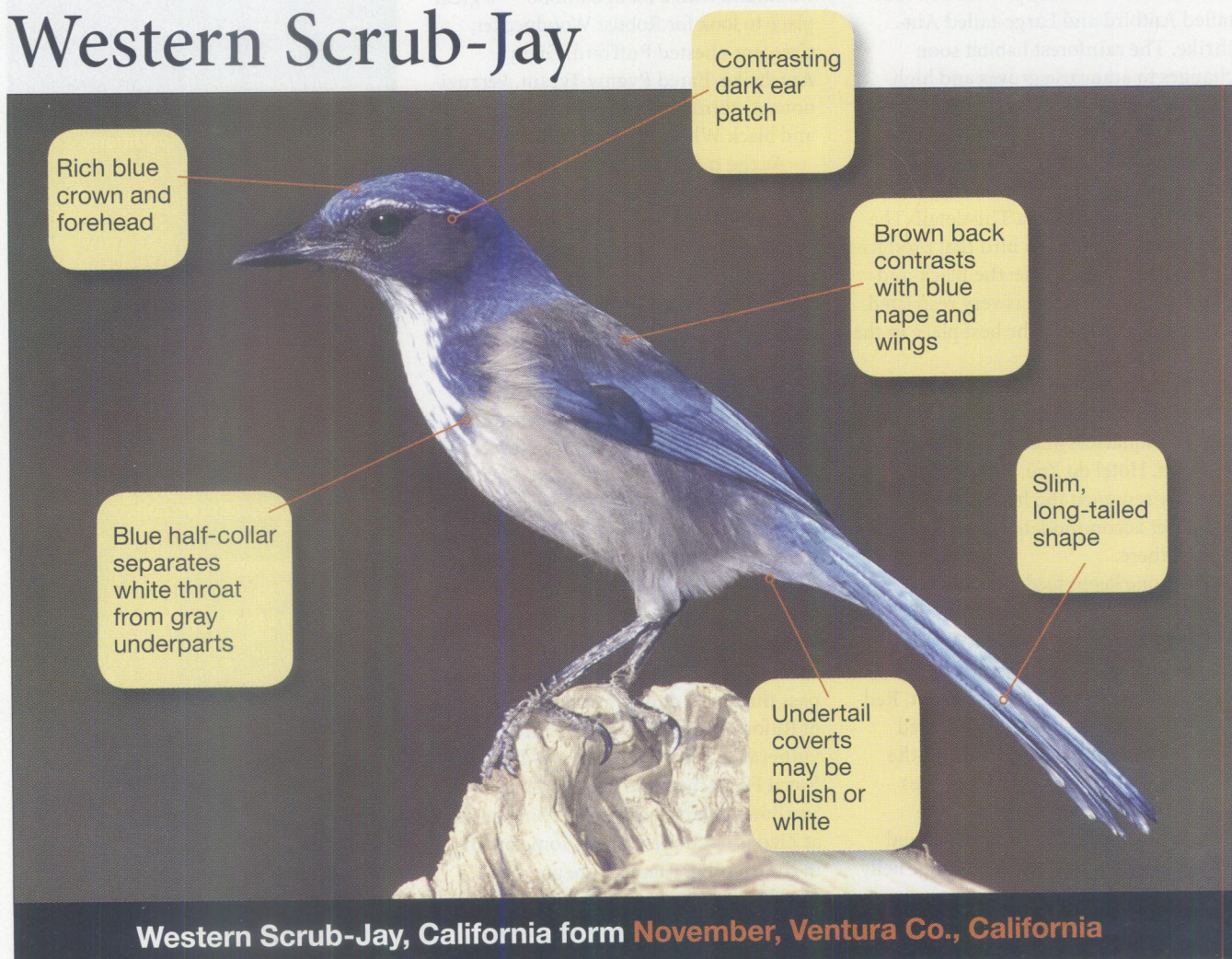


Western Scrub-Jay



Rich blue crown and forehead

Contrasting dark ear patch

Brown back contrasts with blue nape and wings

Blue half-collar separates white throat from gray underparts

Slim, long-tailed shape

Undertail coverts may be bluish or white

Western Scrub-Jay, California form November, Ventura Co., California

What to look for

Blue collar. How distinct and contrasting is it? Does it set off a very white throat patch, or is the throat more blended and gray?

Back patch. Is it brown, gray, or pale gray, and how much does it contrast with the surrounding blue?

Head features. Bill shape, forehead color, and contrast of ear patch are all significant.

Range. Scrub-jays are mostly sedentary, so looking at the map will usually tell you the bird's identity.

If a nonbirding friend from California tells you he has blue jays in his yard, he's demonstrating one reason why ornithologists capitalize the English names of bird species. Those backyard birds on the west coast are blue jays, but they're not Blue Jays, since that official name is reserved for the familiar, crested eastern bird.

So what should we call those jays? It seems your friend isn't the only one who's confused. Currently, we call that species the Western Scrub-Jay, but its name has changed recently and will probably change again.

Up until the 1990s, we had a widespread bird in North America called the Scrub Jay, with several very distinct-looking populations. In 1995, a committee of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) formally split the bird into

the angular *Pico das Agulhas Negras* (Black Needles Peak), at 9,144 feet high, the highest mountain in Rio de Janeiro.

Access is via a gravel road that starts in rainforest that usually provides Rufous-tailed Antbird and Large-tailed Antshrike. The rainforest habitat soon changes to araucaria groves and high-altitude grasslands with shrubs — great places to look for Araucaria Tit-Spintail, the beautiful Plovercrest hummingbird, Diademed Tanager, Serra do Mar Tyrannulet, and Itatiaia Thistletail. The highlight, however, is a bird that produces a long, haunting whistle: the Black-and-gold Cotinga. Its range is very restricted. This road is probably the best place in the world to see it.

The lower part of Itatiaia has a more typical tropical rainforest, as well as the park headquarters and an adjacent museum. Hotel do Ypê, Hotel Simon (recently renamed the Itatiaia Park Hotel), and other accommodating hotels are also located there.

Each one keeps feeders that attract several tanagers and many hummingbirds — Black Jacobin, Violet-capped Woodnymph, Frilled Coquette, and Brazilian Ruby — as well as Saffron Toucanet, Red-rumped Warbling-Finch, Blue-naped Chlorophonia, and other treats for the eye. This is also one of the few places where you can see both races of the Surucua Trogon: *surrucura*, with a red belly, and *aurantius*, with an orange belly.

Along the Ouro Fino

One spot that is growing in popularity is a private reserve in the middle of a large Atlantic Rainforest remnant near São Miguel Arcanjo in southern São Paulo State — the Parque do Zizo.

Just 94 miles southwest of Guarulhos airport, it is located in the Serra da Paranapiacaba (part of the Serra do Mar), but its average altitude is lower than that at Itatiaia, so the mix of species is different. But what makes the place truly special is its isolation, making it possible to see a great number of rare birds. Where else would you have the chance of seeing, on the same day, the striking but vulnerable Helmeted Woodpecker, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, and Buff-fronted Owl?

Several trails pass trees festooned with bromeliads, thick lianas falling from the canopy, giant ferns, and everything else that makes that classic rainforest scene. My favorite is called *Ouro Fino* (fine gold),

which eventually passes beside a mountain creek of the same name.

For the first couple hundred yards, the trail leads through some secondary woodland with a lot of bamboo — a great place to look for Robust Woodpecker, Crescent-chested Puffbird, Giant Antshrike, Eared Pygmy-Tyrant, Ferruginous Antbird, and the vulnerable brown and black White-bearded Antshrike.

As the trail reaches the primary rainforest, you can expect to see Solitary Tinamou, Rufous-capped Motmot, White-throated Woodcreeper, the vulnerable Salvadori's Antwren, Short-tailed Antthrush, Cinnamon-vented Piha, and Hooded Berryeater. The path provides many great views of forested valleys, good spots to look for soaring raptors, especially Mantled Hawk and Black Hawk-Eagle. An Ornate Hawk-Eagle is always a possibility too.

As you go downhill, you reach the Ouro Fino River and scenic waterfalls. Keep an eye out for Fasciated Tiger-Heron standing by a boulder. Other typical birds in the area include Black-throated Trogon, Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper, and Riverbank Warbler. Before the trail is done, you pass through a damp forest, the territory of Rufous-breasted Leaftosser, the vulnerable, spectacularly crested Atlantic Royal Flycatcher, and lekking Blue (or Swallow-tailed) Manakins. A birding day at Zizo is not done without some owling in the evening. Chances are good you could find Tawny-browed and Buff-fronted Owls right next to the lodge.

At the foot of mountains

About 90 miles east of Guarulhos, Ubatuba is a tranquil town on a quiet bay by the sea, with many scenic beaches. Because of them, it's advisable to stay away during the summer vacation and holidays. The best hotels for the birding tourist are located inland, at the foot of the forested Serra do Mar. There are many to choose from, but I prefer private nature reserves, so I can be sure my money is going back to the environment. A great one is the Reserva Guainumbi, which offers good lodging, too.

The word *Guainumbi* means "hummingbird" in the native Tupi language. At first sight, the visitor will see that the reserve is aptly named, since Saw-billed Hermits, Festive Coquettes, and many other tropical jewels fly around the lodge all the time. In the rainforest itself, you

Guides and lodging

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Paulo Boute, Boute Expeditions

www.boute-expeditions.com
pauloboute@boute-expeditions.com

Hotel do Ypê, Itatiaia

www.hoteldoype.com.br

Itatiaia Park Hotel (Hotel Simon), Itatiaia

www.itaiiaparkhotel.com.br

Parque do Zizo, São Miguel Arcanjo

www.parquedozizo.com.br
reservas@parquedozizo.com.br

Reserva Guainumbi, Ubatuba

www.reservaguainumbi.com.br
atendimento@reservaguainumbi.com.br

can expect to see many species that are not as common in higher altitudes: Buff-bellied Puffbird, the *ariel* race of the Channel-billed Toucan, Scaled Antbird, Slaty Bristlefront, Red-ruffed Fruitcrow, Bare-throated Bellbird, Yellow-legged Thrush, the vivid Brazilian Tanager, and many others.

Ubatuba is also one of the best places in the world to find the tiny cotinga called Buff-throated Purpletuft. But there are more rare cotingas to be seen, as the area is also where the equally small and mythic Kinglet Calyptura (*Calyptura cristata*) was last spotted.

Rediscovered in 1996 after more than 100 years without a confirmed sighting, the species qualifies as critically endangered not only because of its tiny population, estimated to be fewer than 50 individuals, but also because of its minuscule range, about three square kilometers. The bird has not been reliably recorded since 2006, but there's always a chance. What a great way that would be to end a trip to the *Mata Atlântica!* **b**

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three species: the Florida Scrub-Jay, Western Scrub-Jay, and Island Scrub-Jay.

Alert birders were not surprised by the move, because many observers had long noticed the differences among the forms. In addition, we were aware that the Western Scrub-Jay included two distinct types. One was found throughout California and Baja, extending north to extreme southern Washington. The other lived in the interior, from Nevada and the eastern edge of California east to Texas.

A study published just last October looked at the DNA of Western Scrub-Jays and found very strong divergence between the two forms. The authors suggested that the species be split in two, with the coastal form becoming "California Scrub-Jay" and the interior bird being called "Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay."

If the AOU formalizes the split, all birders will pay attention to the distinctions between the forms. In most places, range will identify the birds. The coastal (California) and interior (Woodhouse's) scrub-jays overlap only in Douglas County in western Nevada, where they interbreed to a limited extent. But there are many differences besides range.

"California Scrub-Jay" is much more colorful and contrasting than its inland relative. It seems more common over most of its range, favoring oak woodland and often living in parks and yards. "Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay" has a more muted pattern, and its behavior seems muted, too: Often uncommon and sparsely distributed, it seems shier and more elusive than the coastal bird. Often it lives in pinyon-juniper habitat. The dull colors and muted contrast of this form make it more similar to Mexican Jay, which is common in oak woodland from southern Arizona to western Texas.

Even within the "California" and "Woodhouse's" scrub-jays, there is regional variation. Within the state of California, the birds average a little paler toward the east and smaller toward the south. In the interior, the birds in central Texas are somewhat brighter and more colorful than those in the western part of the range. These local flavors remind us that traveling birders should look for variation in all birds, even those that may be common backyard species for some. **b**

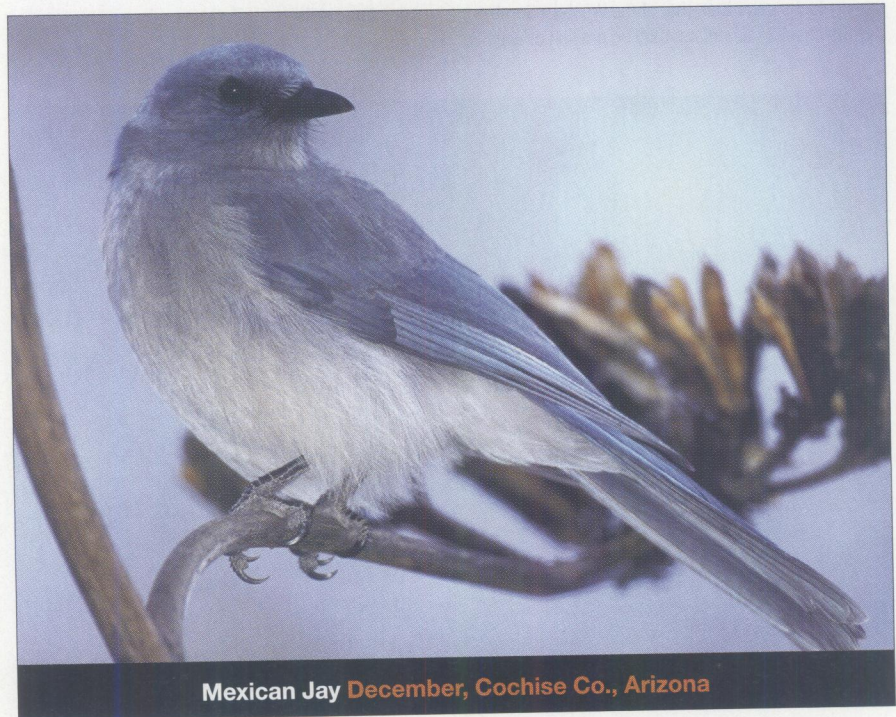
Kenn Kaufman is author of Flights Against the Sunset. Brian E. Small (www.BrianSmallPhoto.com) is a nature photographer.



Western Scrub-Jay, Woodhouse's form December, Socorro Co., New Mexico

Birders who become familiar with Western Scrub-Jay in the Pacific states may be stunned when they see how different the interior forms can be. The interior bird (which may soon be called "Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay") has a much more muted pattern. Its grayish white throat contrasts less with the face and the faint blue collar, its gray-brown back shows less contrast,

and its shade of blue is paler and duller overall. Brian Small photographed this bird in central New Mexico; "Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays" farther east, in Texas, average a little brighter, while those as far west as Arizona and Nevada are even slightly duller and less contrasty than this.

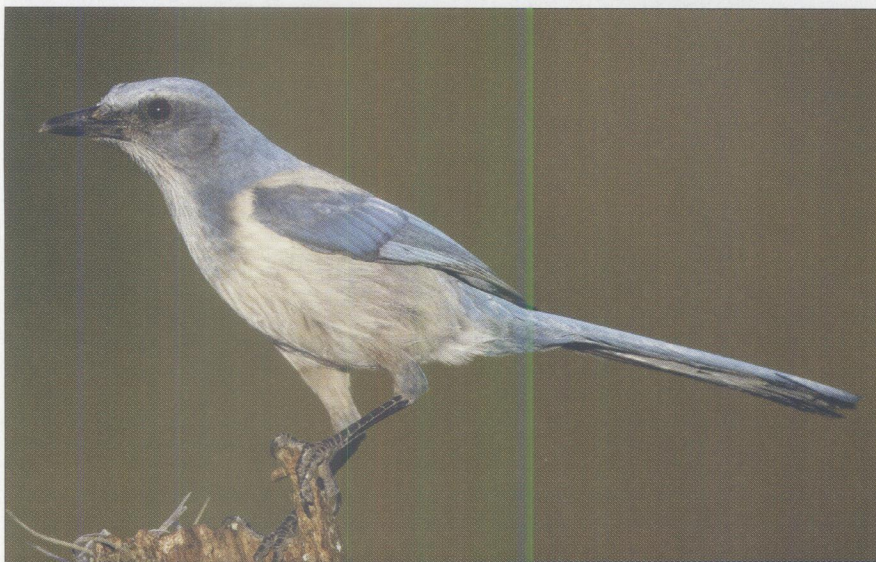


Mexican Jay December, Cochise Co., Arizona

Unlike the coastal form of Western Scrub-Jay, the interior form ("Woodhouse's") can look similar to Mexican Jay. The two occur close together in the Southwest, with Mexican Jay usually in oak woods and "Woodhouse's" in stands of juniper and pinyon. Mexican Jay lacks the blue half-collar and dark ear patch, and the wash of gray on its back is usually

subtle and doesn't contrast with the adjacent blue. (These points apply best to the Arizona form of Mexican Jay; birds in the Big Bend region of Texas show slightly more contrast.) Overall shape differs, too, as Mexican Jay is chunkier and shorter-tailed than the scrub-jay, and their voices are very different.

Turn the page for more



Florida Scrub-Jay February, Sarasota Co., Florida

Florida Scrub-Jay is separated from its relatives by half a continent and by its highly distinctive social behavior, but clear visible differences exist also. It has a frosted look, created by its whitish forehead and pale gray back, and its overall shade of blue usually looks paler than that of the Western Scrub-Jay. Its cheeks (auriculars) may be grayish or washed

with blue, but either way, they show less contrast than those of other scrub-jays. Found nowhere in the world but Florida, and a characteristic denizen of the oak scrub of the peninsula, this beautiful bird is thought to have declined by 90 percent from historic population levels.



Island Scrub-Jay June, Santa Cruz Island, California

The opposite extreme from the Florida Scrub-Jay, geographically and visually, is the big, dark Island Scrub-Jay, found nowhere in the world but Santa Cruz Island, in the Channel Islands off the coast of southern California. Richly colored, mostly deep blue above with a dark brown back, it also has contrasting black cheeks and a proportionately very heavy bill.

Seen in life, it looks conspicuously larger than other scrub-jays, with a bulky, heavy body and large head. Of course, if you're seeing it in life, you're on Santa Cruz Island, so you already know which species it is; the Western Scrub-Jay is not known to stray out to the island.

Social jays

The biggest difference between Florida Scrub-Jay and other scrub-jays is its cooperative breeding system. Territories are held by family groups, and young birds stay on the territory, sometimes for years, helping to raise subsequent generations. Among other scrub-jays in the U.S. and northern Mexico, territories are held by pairs, not family groups. However, the Mexican Jay is also a social breeder, especially in its Arizona populations. And the southernmost form of scrub-jay in Mexico — which may deserve status as a separate species, Sumichrast's Scrub-Jay — may also hold group territories and practice cooperative breeding.

Scrub-jays and relatives in North America

- Western Scrub-Jay (including "California Scrub-Jay" and "Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay")
- Island Scrub-Jay
- Florida Scrub-Jay
- Mexican Jay

Uphill planters

The California form of Western Scrub-Jay was the subject of an ingenious observation by field biologist Joseph Grinnell in the 1930s. Noting that acorns always rolled downhill, Grinnell wondered how there could be any oaks growing on hilltops. Then he noticed that scrub-jays, industriously gathering acorns to hide them away in the ground, often flew uphill. Observations elsewhere have since confirmed the importance of various jays (including Blue Jays in the east) as acorn dispersers.