
Pinyon Jay

Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus

Aves — Passeriformes — Corvidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)
Statewide: Critically imperiled (S1)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: Watch list (Type 5)
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Habitat threats and declining population trend in Idaho.

TAXONOMY

Although 3 subspecies have been proposed (Balda 2002), they are not widely recognized (e.g., American Ornithologist' Union 1957). Northern Rocky Mountain breeders said to have shorter bills with slight decurve along culmens, while those from the Great Basin ranges and central and southern Rockies said to have slightly longer and straighter bills.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The pinyon jay is a resident of central Oregon, eastern and southern California, northern Baja California, most of Nevada, southeastern Idaho, Utah, northern Arizona, central portions of the southern half of Montana, western and central Wyoming, western South Dakota, northwestern Nebraska, western and southern Colorado, extreme western Oklahoma, and portions of New Mexico west of the eastern plains. Generally winters throughout the breeding range, but when pine-cone crop fails, may irrupt into western Oregon, southern Washington, northern Idaho, central Montana, south to southeastern California, southeastern Arizona, northern Chihuahua, northern Sonora, western and central Texas, east to western Nebraska and western Kansas (Balda 2002). The pinyon jay is locally common in southeastern Idaho where the population size is estimated to be about 3500 individuals (Rosenberg 2004).

POPULATION TREND

This species is undergoing a significant decline throughout its range. Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data reveal statistically significant declines at the level of the United States (-4.5% per year), the western U.S. (-4.7% per year), physiographic regions (Piñon-Juniper Woodland at -7.4% per year and Basin and Range at -9.5% per year), and individual states (California at -7.3% per year, Colorado at -7.2% per year, Nevada at -10.7% per year, and New Mexico at -4.4% per year) during the period 1966–2002 (Sauer et al. 2003). No trend information exists for Idaho due to insufficient detection on BBS routes.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The pinyon jay is closely tied to piñon-juniper woodlands, but also breeds in sagebrush, scrub oak, chaparral, ponderosa pine and Jeffrey pine forests (Balda 2002). It prefers more mature stages of piñon, which produce more seeds. If habitat conditions are good, a flock may occupy the same home range for decades (Ryser 1985). However, due to the unpredictable nature of the piñon seed food supply, flocks may wander in search of adequate seed supplies.

ISSUES

Greatest threat to pinyon jays is the policy of land managers to eradicate piñon-juniper woodlands because of concern about encroachment of this habitat into sagebrush communities. This species is therefore threatened because of loss of piñon-juniper habitat through conversion to other land cover types, including clearing for residential development (Gillihan 2004).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Retain patches of mature piñon or piñon-juniper of at least 7 square miles (18 sq km), which is approximately the area of each flock's home range (Balda and Bateman 1971). Successful breeding is very closely tied to piñon pines and seed production, so retain large trees (which are the most prolific cone-producers). Colonies are sensitive to human disturbance, so development such as roads or picnic areas should be kept well away from known nesting sites (Gillihan 2004).

Pinyon Jay

Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus



Map created on September 22, 2005
and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center.
Sources: Point data are from Idaho Conservation Data Center,
Idaho Department of Fish and Game (2005). Predicted distribution
is from the Wildlife Habitat Relationships Models (WHR),
A Gap Analysis of Idaho: Final Report. Idaho Cooperative Fish
and Wildlife Research Unit, Moscow, ID (Scott et al. 2002).
Predicted distribution is approximate (for more information, go to
http://www.wildlife.uidaho.edu/idgap/idgap_report.asp).

