

Blue Jay

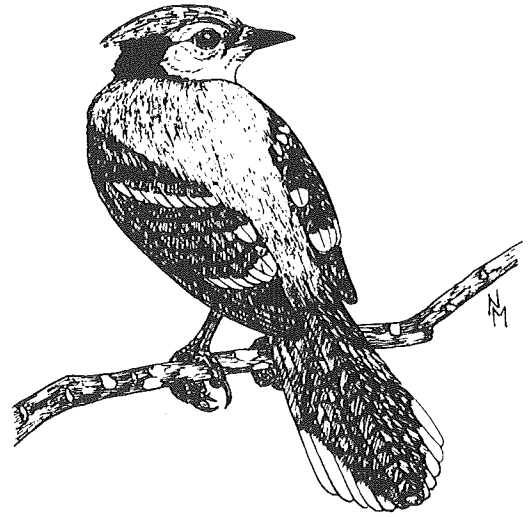
Cyanocitta cristata

The Blue Jay is an abundant, eastern Nearctic species that is expanding westward. It now occurs regularly as far west as Colorado, where it has been found to hybridize with the Steller's Jay. It is one of the most common, conspicuous, and well-known birds in the Northeast and has certainly benefited from the post-World War II bird-feeder explosion. Although inhabiting both deciduous and coniferous woods, it is quite tolerant of humans and will nest in towns and suburbs. It is still, however, essentially a woodland bird, and is most abundant in oak and beech forests.

Although an opportunistic omnivore, the Blue Jay's diet is three-quarters vegetarian: acorns, beech nuts, and corn are its staple food. In the summer its diet becomes mostly insectivorous, and at all times of the year it is a sharp-eyed scavenger. The Blue Jay's habit of taking food and storing it in a crevice or other hiding place makes it an unwelcome visitor at some feeding stations.

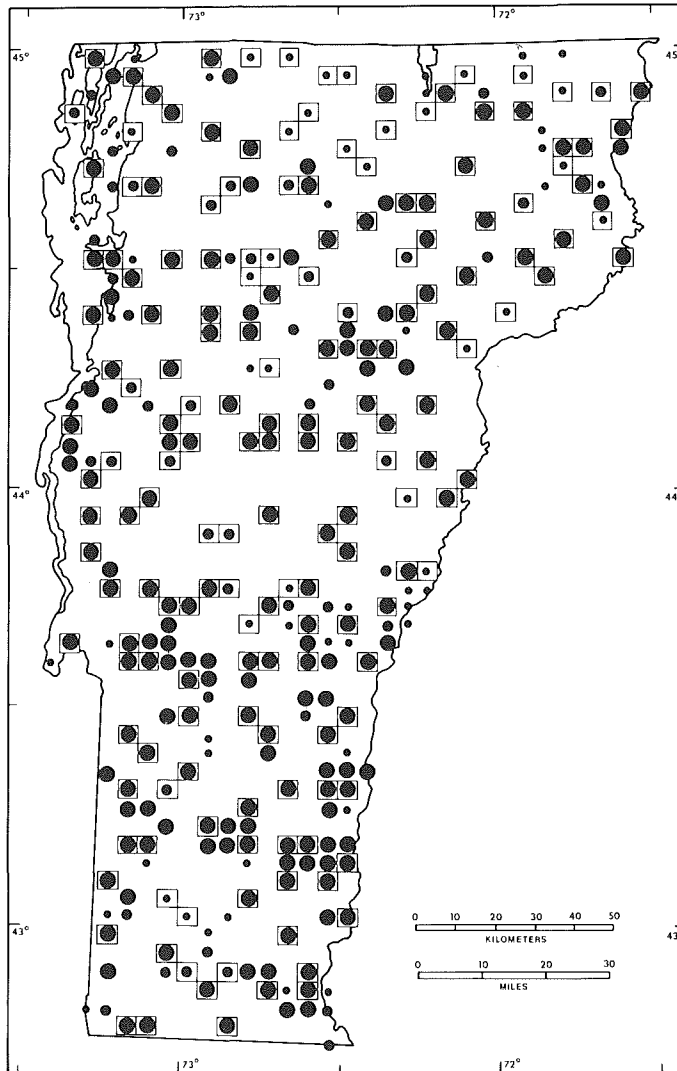
The Blue Jay breeds in all regions of Vermont. It is not, however, a sedentary resident species. Blue Jays are highly migratory, and large numbers of them may be seen in September and October migrating along mountain ridges. Whether all locally breeding birds participate in these southward movements remains to be established. Certainly feeding stations host many jays from more northern localities—birds that leave each spring for breeding areas north of Vermont; and the arrival and/or passage of birds from more southerly wintering areas can be detected well into June. Jays may nest locally throughout the migratory period, however, indicating that some local breeders remain throughout the winter.

Blue Jays may nest in either coniferous or deciduous trees. The nest is a bowl of twigs in a tree crotch or on branches near the main trunk, about 3–5 m (10–15 ft) from the ground. Both members of the pair construct the nest, which is made of sticks, with



grass and other soft material in the center to form a deep cup. The eggs (4 to 7 per clutch) are buff or greenish spotted with brown (more heavily at the large end). Of 18 clutches, none had more than 5 eggs. Although Blue Jays are noted for their vocal alarm calls, during the breeding season they become furtive and quiet. When predators appear the territorial *tea cup* call is given, and predators are assailed; but around the nest the pair is the picture of stealth. The female is usually responsible for the 16- to 18-day incubation tasks, but the male may feed her during this period (Harrison 1978; Terres 1980). Both tend and aggressively protect the young during the 17- to 21-day nestling period. Noisy family groups of fledglings and adults are quite conspicuous, and were one of the principal methods of confirming breeding in Vermont during the Atlas Project.

Vermont dates for recorded nest building extend from May 27 to July 1, but nesting commences much earlier than these dates indicate. Sample nesting sites include a nest at Union Village being built about 12 m (40 ft) up in a sugar maple; a nest at Grafton 3 m (10 ft) up in an American beech; and also at Grafton a nest 8.5 m (28 ft) up on a white pine branch. Vermont nests with eggs have been found from April 20 to July 1; most dates are in May and early June. Most



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 179 (100%)

Possible breeding: 27 (15% of total)
 Probable breeding: 22 (12% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 130 (73% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	31	100	17
Green Mountains	54	100	30
North Central	19	100	11
Northeast Highlands	16	100	9
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	24	100	13

of the nests found were in conifers, hemlock, pine, or spruce. Dates for nests with young range from May 15 to July 5. Fledging dates range from June 3 to August 14. Many late nestings may represent renesting after failure of an earlier attempt.

The Blue Jay apparently has always been and is likely to remain a common species in Vermont. Its omnivorous eating habits and its ability to occupy disturbed and suburban areas have stood the species in good stead in the face of man's perturbations of the natural environment.

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