

ECBA Pinyon Jay Survey Effort at Potential Nesting Sites in Central Oregon

March-May 2025

Introduction

Pinyon jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) is a Central Oregon corvid species that was petitioned for listing under the ESA in 2022. The petition was reviewed and given a positive 90-day finding in August of 2024 after which US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) started a 12-month status review to determine if listing under the ESA is warranted. Pinyon jay is also proposed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) by the state in their 2025 draft of their State Wildlife Action Plan. The local ecology of pinyon jays in Central Oregon remains largely unknown, as there has been no research conducted on their populations or habitats in this region. Surveys are needed to support data collection efforts and recent research. Threats to the species include drought, insect damage, disease, and habitat removal.

For this project, volunteers from the East Cascades Bird Alliance (ECBA) surveyed select sites in Central Oregon to record the presence of nesting of pinyon jays. Volunteers had to attend a one-day, in-person training session to learn how to appropriately survey for nesting pinyon jay. They were organized into pairs and assigned a site to survey (See Figure 1). Surveys required teams to visit their site three times March 22, 2025, and May 30, 2025. FWS staff and volunteers confirmed pinyon jay breeding behavior at three sites identified as potential nesting habitat.

Methods

Training

Staff from the Great Basin Bird Observatory (GBBO) and FWS trained volunteers at the Redmond Library on Saturday March 22, 2025 from 9am to 12pm. The in-person and field training sessions was presented by Ned Bohman (GBBO) and Claudia Funari (FWS). This in-person portion also included training on how to use the GBBO field observation APP on smart phones. The field portion of the training took place at Peterson Ridge park in Sisters, Oregon where volunteers were shown how to survey for birds, approach nesting trees, and how to document occurrences using the GBBO APP.

Training Agenda

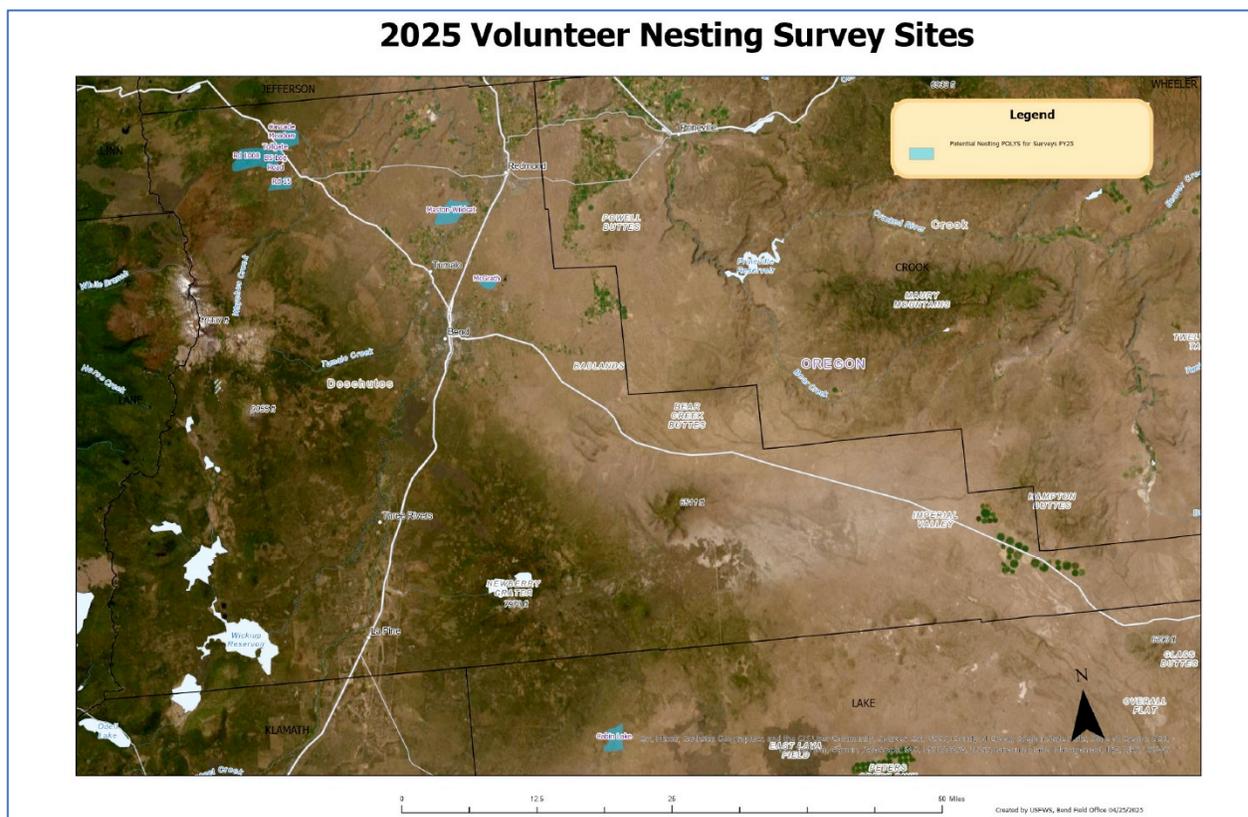
- 9:00 AM to Noon
 - Pinyon Jay Natural History
 - Nesting Site Survey protocol
 - GBBO Survey App
- Noon to 1 PM - Lunch at USFWS (bring your own)
 - Survey Team Sign-ups
 - Review and Assign Survey Sites
- 1 PM to 3 PM - Field Trip to a site to be determined by USFW to practice nesting site survey protocol.

Surveys

Eight sites were chosen by volunteers for survey in 2025. These sites included the following: Tollgate, Cascades Meadows, BS Log Rd, Road 108, Rd 15, Maston-Wildcat, McGrath, and Cabin Lake. See Figure 1 below for surveyed sites.

Nest site surveys required volunteers to pair up and visit specific sites selected by and assigned to their team. Volunteers conducted survey visits at their sites on 3 to 4 different days of their choice between March 22, 2025 through May 30, 2025. Survey dates were required to be at minimum 7-10 days apart. The protocol for the nesting site surveys (*Guidance for Locating Pinyon Jay Nests and Confirming Breeding* from the Pinyon Jay Working Group) and was provided during the training event.

Figure 1. Survey Sites



Communication

The volunteers were coordinated by Laurel Collins (ECBA), Claudia Funari (FWS), and Miriam Lipsitz (ECBA).

ECBA and Great Basin Bird Organization (GBBO) coordinated to create a [google site](#) to facilitate ongoing communication between surveyors, GBBO staff, and FWS staff.

Survey volunteers included the following people: Anne Ankrom, Dan Ankrom, Laurel Collins, Josh Collins, Clay Crofton, Kimberly Fiscus, Claudia Funari, Trevor Gardunia, Barbara Hawkins,

Lauire Hildebrandt, Amy Keiraldo Sanchez, and Aaron Jenkins. See Table 1 for each site surveyed by volunteers.

Table 1. *Volunteers and Assigned Sites for Survey*

Name	Site Assigned for Survey
Dan Ankrom	McGrath
Anne Ankrom	McGrath
Clay Crofton	BS Log and Cabin Lake
Amy Kieraldo-Sanchez	Maston
Laurie Hildebrandt	Rd 1008
Barbara Hawkins	Rd 1008
Aaron Jenkins	Maston
Laurel Collins	Sage Flat and Cascade Meadow
Josh Collines	Sage Flat and Cascade Meadow

Results

Observations

Volunteers observed pinyon jays at 5 of the 8 sites during their surveys: Tollgate, Cascades Meadows, Cabin Lake, Maston-Wildcat, and McGrath. No pinyon jays were observed during surveys at BS Log Road, Road 1008, or Sage Flat.

Nesting Behavior

Nesting behavior was recorded at 3 of the 8 sites: Tollgate, Cascades Meadows, and Cabin Lake. Multiple nests were discovered at the Cabin Lake site in late April by Dr. Jherime Kellerman; he had not volunteered for ECBA but was surveying the site for his graduate student. He found 3 nests at this site and all nests were in ponderosa pine. At the Tollgate site in early April, over 10 pinyon jays were observed collecting nesting material and building nests in ponderosa trees (Figure 2 and 3). At the Cascades Meadows site in mid-May, volunteers observed a fledgling pinyon jay on the ground and hiding in bushes; the parents were continuing to feed it (Figure 4). The volunteers searched the trees around the location of the fledgling and a potential nest was found in a ponderosa pine tree. Both the age of the fledgling and the lack of ability to fly indicated that the bird may have forced fledged; the potential cause of the forced fledge may have been the presence of homeless campers nearby that had moved into the area after the previous site visit.

Figure 2 Pinyon Jay Collecting Nest Material at Tollgate Site

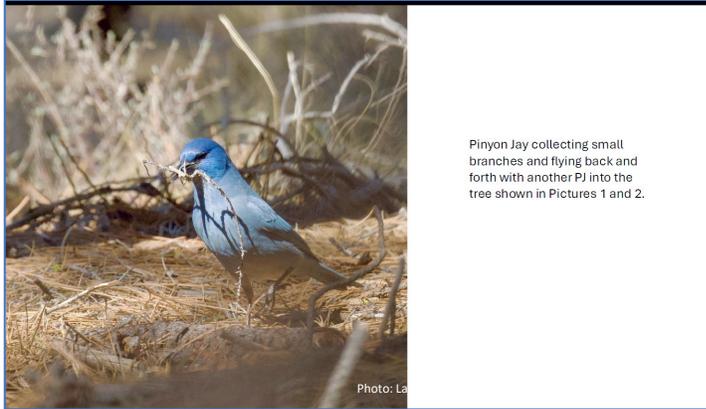


Figure 3 Pinyon Jay and Potential Nest Being Built at Tollgate Site



Figure 4 Fledgling Pinyon Jay at Cascades Meadows Site



COORDINATION CONTACTS

Miriam Lipsitz

East Cascades Bird Alliance, Volunteer Coordinator

Bend, Oregon

hollyhob7@gmail.com

Laurel Collins
East Cascades Bird Alliance, Chair Conservation and Science Committee & Board Member
Bend, Oregon
laurelgene@gmail.com

Claudia Funari
Fish and Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bend Field Office
63095 Deschutes Market Rd. Bend, Oregon
claudia_funari@fws.gov

Ned Bohman
Great Basin Bird Observatory
Bohman@gbbo.org

Report prepared and edited by:

Claudia Funari, US Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, Bend, Oregon
and Laurel Collins, East Cascades Bird Alliance.