



PINYON JAY

Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus

Pinyon Jays are extremely social and do everything in flocks, which consist of family clans. These birds are famous for their ability to fill their expandable esophagus with pine seeds, which they cache in various places within the flock's home range.

DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS

The core of the Pinyon Jay's range is the southwestern U.S. north into the northern Rocky Mountains, with isolated populations in California, Oregon, and the western Great Plains. South Dakota is at the extreme northeast edge of the range. The Pinyon Jay is a rare to uncommon permanent resident in scattered locations in the Black Hills and southern Pine Ridge Escarpment. This species has experienced one of the greatest population decrease of any of the state's breeding species in the past 25 years. Before the mid-20th century, Pinyon Jays were locally abundant in the Black Hills and Harding County pine forests (Over and Thoms 1946). From the 1960s into the early 1990s, including during the first Atlas, the species was a common resident in the Black Hills and continued to occur in Harding County (Pettingill and Whitney 1965, Rosche 1982, South Dakota Ornithologists' Union 1991). By the 21st century, Pinyon Jays were uncommon and had disappeared from Harding County (Tallman *et al.* 2002). Most of the species' South Dakota population was, and is, in the southwestern Black Hills; other current Black Hill's observations are of small numbers of birds at scattered locations.

HABITAT

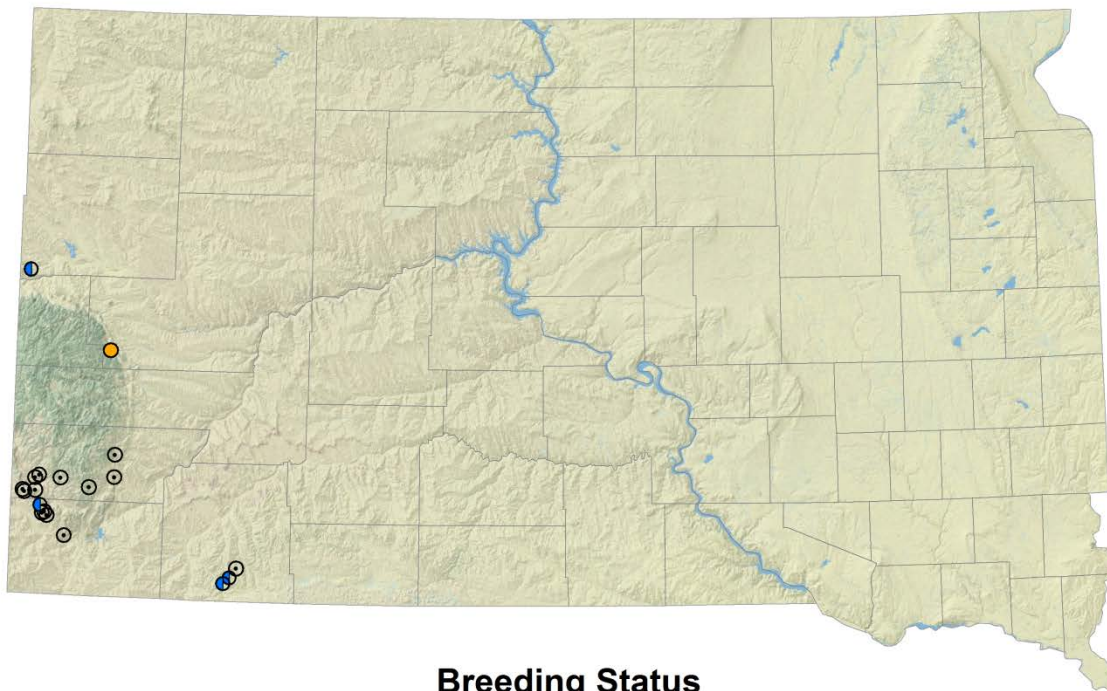
In South Dakota, Pinyon Jay habitat is low elevation (3500' to 4500'), dry, sparse ponderosa pine woodlands and scrublands, often with considerable amounts of interspersed grassland. All second Atlas observations were in ponderosa pine forest.

BREEDING BIOLOGY

South Dakota's Pinyon Jays nest from April through mid-June. Nesting is highly synchronous within the flock; all pairs build nests, lay eggs, and raise chicks at the same time. The nest, built in a pine tree, is a fairly large and bulky open cup, made of sticks and lined with finer plant materials, human refuse, feathers, or hair. Females incubate the 3 to 5 eggs for 17 days. Both parents care for the chicks, which depart the nest at 22 to 23 days. Young birds form nursery crèches until they can feed themselves in 6 to 8 weeks, at which time they join the main flock. Most remain in their natal flock their entire lives and, once they choose a mate, mate for life (Balda 2002).

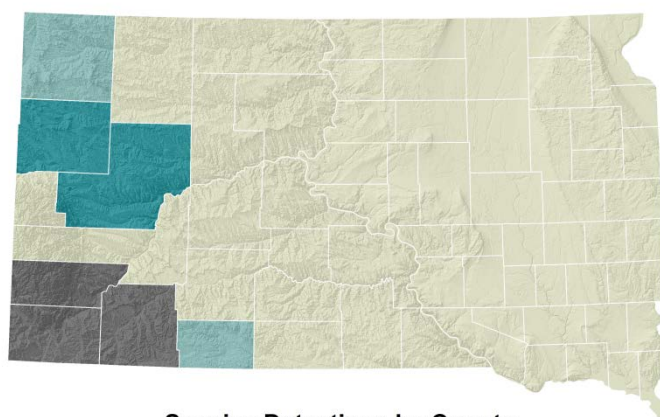
Number of Records During SDBBA2			
	Blocks	Extra Obs.	Total
Confirmed	0	1	1
Probable	0	4	4
Possible	3	11	14
Observed	0	0	0
Total	3 (0.7%)	16	19

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Breeding Status

- Confirmed breeding
- Probably breeding
- Possibly breeding
- Observed; not breeding at location



Species Detections by County

- First Atlas Only
- Second Atlas Only
- Both Atlases
- Neither Atlas



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Text written by Nancy Drilling
Maps created by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies staff
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