# Blue Jay

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

REMARKABLE RASCALS

## blue Jays

Ornithologists are puzzled by this simple question: what makes one Blue Jay migrate and another winter over - when both share the same summer territory? Likewise, some blue jays will winter over one year, and migrate the next. These large, striking songbirds have mysterious and unpredictable migration behavior, and it is not exactly clear what factors determine migration.

Blue Jays have earned a somewhat rascally reputation for themselves because some will occasionally feed on the eggs or nestlings of other birds.

Blue Jays frequently mimic the calls of hawks, a behavior thought to communicate to other jays that a hawk is around, or to trick other species into believing a hawk is around.

### Interesting Facts:

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| **Family:** | Corvidae |
| **Scientific Name:** | *Cyanocitta cristata* |
| **Location:** | The Blue Jay's range extends from central Canada down to Florida, and from the East coast to west of the Rockies. Ever expanding westward in range, some are now establishing territory in parts of Washington. Blue Jays prefer wooded habitat like deciduous, coniferous, or mixed forests. You will find them most often on the edge of forests, rather than deep within them. They are also found in suburban areas. |
| **Migration:** | Blue Jays are partially migratory; some birds migrate, especially out of their northern-most ranges, but some Blue Jays winter over in all parts of their range. |



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| **Nesting:** | Nests consist of a cup-like mesh of twigs, grass, and mud, lined with softer materials. They nest in the crotch of tree branches, commonly about 10-25 feet off the ground. Females incubate the eggs 17-18 days, and produce 3-7 bluish eggs with brownish spots. Fledglings leave the nest in 17-19 days, and Blue Jays have 1-2 broods each summer. |
| **Diet:** | Their diet is mostly vegetarian; they eat nuts, including acorns, as well as fruit and seeds. They also are known to eat insects, bird eggs, and even nestlings. |
| **Size and Color:** | Adults are 12" long, with a wingspan of 13" to 17". They are large, mostly blue and crested. They have a black collar and necklace, and their wings and tail are bright blue with black bars and white tips. Their underparts are grayish white. |
| **Special Characteristics:** | They form large feeding flocks in autumn. They are known to imitate the calls of hawks. |
| **Attracting:** | Blue Jays, especially in winter, are known to visit feeders for an offering of sunflower seed or cracked corn. Their large size means that a hopper- or platform-style feeder is more suitable for them. |



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