

Steller's Jay

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

the distinctive steller's Jay



striking jay is a larger, western cousin of the Blue Jay, but with a more pronounced and darker-colored crest. Its large size and impressive blue and black coloring make it very distinctive and easy to identify when spotted. These birds reside primarily in coniferous or mixed forests, but are also a familiar sight at picnic and camping locations in the west, due to their notorious scavenging behaviors.

Interesting Facts:

Family: Corvidae

Scientific Name: *Cyanocitta stelleri*

Location: The Steller's Jay has a vast North American range, from as far north as southern Alaska to as far south as Central America. Its range extends from the coast to as far east as the Rocky Mountains and southwest Texas. The Steller's Jay prefers the coniferous woodlands of the West, but must also have some open space. Within its range, it is absent from desert areas and the Great Basin. It typically lives in flocks of greater than 10 birds.

Migration: Steller's Jays do not migrate, but may move down from higher to lower elevations when winter arrives.

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| Nesting: | Nests are usually well hidden in a shady conifer, and the needles of the tree are often used to line the nest. Due to urban development, they have also been reported nesting in nooks on buildings. Though normally quite vocal birds, Steller's Jays are very quiet around the nest. The female lays a clutch that varies from 2-6 bluish-green eggs with dark brown markings. She incubates for about 16 days, and the male feeds her while she's incubating. Pairs are monogamous. |
| Diet: | Steller's Jays eat a varied diet of nuts, pine seeds, acorns, berries, and small invertebrates. They will steal bird eggs and nestlings from the nests of small birds, and have even been known to attack adult birds. They are also a common scavenger around human habitations, such as picnic and camping areas. They forage on the ground or in trees and shrubs. These birds hoard food and hide it among their habitat for times when fresh food is scarce. |
| Size and Color: | This large, crested jay grows 12-13" long. Its crest is dark blue or black, with dark upperparts, head and breast and white streaks on its forehead. Its rump and belly are blue, and its wings and tail are blue with black bars. Body coloring will vary by range: in Central America, the Steller's Jay is typically seen with less gray and more blue on the crest and upperparts. Sexes are similar in color. The Steller's Jay and its eastern counterpart, the Blue Jay, are the only crested jays in North America. The Steller's Jay used to be the sole crested jay species west of the Rockies, but the Blue Jay is expanding its range westward and these two species occasionally interbreed, producing hybrids. |
| Song: | Like most birds, its calls are varied and include a variety of rattling and guttural sounds. Calls include "shaack, shaack, shack" and "shooka, shooka." In warning, it produces a harsh nasal "wah." It also imitates the cry of the Red-tailed Hawk, which it uses to chase away other birds and prey creatures from its feeding areas. |
| Attracting: | Steller's Jays like high dense cover, especially thick coniferous trees, so you are more likely to attract them into your yard if you have them. They will eat a variety of seeds, and due to their size do better at open-style or hopper feeders than tube-style feeders. They may also eat offerings of mealworms , fruit , peanuts , and other common backyard wild bird foods. |