

Florida Scrub Jays Foraging from Feral Hogs

DANIEL W. BABER¹ AND JOHN G. MORRIS

Department of Biology, Florida Institute of Technology,
Melbourne, Florida, 32901 USA

On three occasions between mid-February and mid-April 1978, Florida Scrub Jays (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) on Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Brevard County, Florida, were observed to land on the backs of feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) and forage, presumably for ectoparasites such as the hog louse (*Haematopinus suis*) or ticks (family Ixodidae). The observations were recorded during morning (0730, 1100) and afternoon (1730) and occurred within 100 m of one another in a scrub flatwood community composed of saw palmetto (*Sereona repens*), oak (*Quercus* spp.), and wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) (Sweet 1976). No attempts were made by the hogs to drive the birds from their backs, and no other behavioral interactions were evident between the jays and the hogs.

Groups of jays appeared excited before each interaction occurred. Jays flew quickly between nearby shrubs, vocalizing loudly before one individual flew from cover and landed on the hog's back. Contact never lasted for more than several seconds, but these actions were often repeated several times. It appeared that the jay initiating the first contact was the only group member to enter into the association. During contact, birds were observed to pick through the hair of the shoulder and mid-back region of the pigs and to peck at and consume prey. On one occasion, a jay flew alternately between two hogs, searching for prey; this jay was subsequently observed "riding" one hog as it moved approximately 4 m while feeding. On another occasion, a jay was observed hovering above the back of a young boar that was rooting, landing repeatedly and searching for prey whenever the hog stood still. Several times this bird flew to nearby shrubs or to the ground before returning to the hog's back. The longest period of contact was approximately 10 s with the total duration of this interaction approaching 1 min.

Similar interspecific interactions have been noted for suids between the bearded pig (*Sus barbatus*) of southeast Asia and the Crowned Wood Partridge (*Rollulus roulroul*) (Fradrich 1972), the wild swine (*Sus scrofa*) of Wilpattu National Park, Ceylon and mynahs (Eisenberg and Lockhart 1972), and the warthog (*Phacochoerus aethiopicus*) and an oxpecker (*Buphagus* sp.) in Nairobi National Park, Kenya (Fradrich 1965). A Western Scrub Jay was observed to remove wood ticks and deer flies from the back of a mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) in Sequoia National Park, California (Dixon 1944).

Florida Scrub Jays occur in stable family units that have an intrafamilial dominance hierarchy (Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1977). The jay-hog interactions observed on Merritt Island may represent a learned behavioral trait maintained within one or several Scrub Jay family groups. These interactions may represent the origin of a more ubiquitous behavior similar, for example, to that of the Small Ground Finch (*Geospiza fuliginosa*) and marine iguanas (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*) (Amadon 1967) or between oxpeckers and many African ungulates (Attwell 1966). Possibly these more complex relationships could have begun in a similar manner.

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¹ Current address: Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon 97331, USA.