

Common Ground-Dove's Injury-feigning Distracts Florida Scrub Jay

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On 11 April 1988, while studying a group of Florida Scrub Jays (*Aphelocoma c. coerulescens*) at Archbold Biological Station, Highlands County, Florida, I noticed an apparently injured Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) about 10 m south of my position. The dove emerged from vegetation, and it slowly and erratically crossed a sandy jeep-road. It appeared to drag its body across the substrate with a combination of leg movements and irregular fluttering of its wings. Believing for an instant that the dove was injured, I started to approach it when a Florida Scrub Jay hopped out onto the road from the same place the dove had emerged (approximately 1 m behind the dove). This jay was in an upright posture, the same as assumed when investigating a novel object such as a camera or day-pack lying on the ground. A moment after the jay emerged, the dove took flight, continuing east in the direction it had been moving. The jay then stopped following the dove, flew north past me, and joined the small group of jays that I had been observing.

The following day, E. D. Hailman and I made a concerted but unsuccessful search for a dove nest near the point where the dove was first observed. Nevertheless, I interpret these observations as injury-feigning display by the dove, which distracted the jay from a potential nest or nest site. Erichsen (1920) described injury-feigning in Common Ground-Doves as "dragging themselves over the ground with drooping wings." Bent (1932: 437) said of his informants that "most observers have noted that when a ground dove's nest is approached, the brooding bird quickly leaves the nest and flutters along the ground, attempting to lure the intruder [presumably human] away by feigning lameness." The latter description better matches my observations of fluttered wings than Erichsen's "drooping wings." C. T. Collins (pers. comm.) has observed such wing-fluttering, and also "rodent-run" displays, in two Trinidad congeners: the Ruddy Ground-Dove (*C. talpacoti*) and the Plain-breasted Ground-Dove (*C. minuta*). The displays were elicited by his approach.

The Common Ground-Dove is a locally common spring-breeding ground-nester at Archbold Biological Station. Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick (1984: 42-43) noted that "Florida Scrub Jays occasionally rob other

birds of their eggs or young, but our observations indicate this is a rare event." This jay species is an omnivorous and opportunistic forager, known to have taken Ground-Dove eggs at the Station on at least five occasions in the last 18 years (J. W. Fitzpatrick pers. comm.). K. J. McGowan (pers. comm.) observed a male Florida Scrub Jay "flush a ground-dove off its nest and eat both eggs in May 1983. The dove displayed, but the jay paid no attention." McGowan also retrieved the leg of a dove nestling from jay fledglings in the summer of 1984. It is not known if a jay would attempt to kill and eat an injured adult dove.

Injury-feigning and "rodent-run" distraction displays evoked by observers have been reported for many species of birds that nest on or near the ground. The observations reported above show that a known avian nest-predator can evoke the display, and that the display works successfully in inducing the predator to follow the displaying bird. McGowan's observation suggests that, if a jay finds the nest itself, subsequent display by the dove will not distract it. Still to be documented in the wild is a case in which nest contents were saved from predation by distraction display before the predator discovered the nest.

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