

**BIRDMAN**

**Name that jay**

BY TED A. GLOVER

When I visit with friends in the Applegate Valley who are nonbirders, I often hear a reference to the blue jays they see regularly in their yards and along the roadways throughout our area. This reminds me why ornithologists always capitalize the names of bird species, and why, although the birds are clearly blue jays, they are not Blue Jays, as that name is reserved exclusively for the familiar crested

jay found primarily east of the Rockies.

In our neck of the woods, the common jays we see are the Steller's Jay (with their bold, dark-blue coloring; dark, nearly black head and foreparts; and magnificent dark crest) and the even more prevalent Western Scrub Jay. Until the 1990s, ornithologists called this bird simply scrub jay. But after careful study the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), which is responsible for the

formal naming of birds in North America, split the scrub jay into three species: the Western Scrub Jay, the Island Scrub Jay and the Florida Scrub Jay.

Even now, there is a movement under way to split the Western Scrub Jay into two separate species since there is a definite difference between the birds seen along the west coast from Baja California north into Washington, and those birds living in the interior west from eastern California and Nevada and all the way to west Texas.

The Western Scrub Jays in our area are much more colorful than their relatives inland. You can spot them throughout the Applegate Valley, particularly in oak woodlands and in your own yards and parks. Look for the brown back that contrasts sharply with the blue nape and wings. Did you know that Western Scrub Jays pair up for long-term bonds and live throughout the year in the same territory? It's been reported that the young of a pair can stay close for some time and help raise subsequent broods.

Two more birds to watch for this time of year are often referred to as "little brown sparrows."

But they, too, have specific names to remember. The Golden-crowned Sparrow returns to our area from its northern breeding grounds and spends time foraging in dense undergrowth. It has a golden crown with black borders. The White-crowned Sparrow has a gray breast and a bold black-and-white striped crown. It is very common in our area in the winter, often seen in flocks of 20 or more, and will often remain in the same area for many weeks. It, too, prefers brushy habitat and can be seen scratching among leaf debris with both feet as it looks for seeds and small insects.

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Photos clockwise from top left: **Western Scrub Jay** (Lee Karney, fws.org), **Island Scrub Jay** (Bruce Smithson, California), **Florida Scrub Jay** (Robert Owens, fws.org), **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (Dave Menke).



Photo of rainbow taken by Maxie Jarrell on Water Gap Road in Williams, Oregon. The old Topper house was built around 1900.

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