

= Azure @-@ hooded jay =

The azure @-@ hooded jay (*Cyanolyca cucullata*) is a species of bird in the family Corvidae . It is found in Middle America . Its natural habitat is subtropical or tropical moist montane forest . This species is known to have four subspecies . It is 11 to 12 inches (28 to 30 cm) in length and is dark blue with a black head and upper chest . The back of the head and neck are sky blue with a white border .

The jays travel in groups of two to ten individuals and may join mixed @-@ species flocks . It is a secretive species and therefore difficult to observe in the wild . As an omnivore , this jay eats berries , seeds , and small , dead animals . Females lay three to four eggs , and the young fledge after twenty days . This species is listed as Least Concern , meaning it is not threatened with extinction .

= = Taxonomy = =

The species was first described by the American ornithologist Robert Ridgway in 1885 . Its specific epithet , *cucullata* , is the Latin word for " hooded " . Its closest relative is the beautiful jay (*C. pulchra*) of Colombia and Ecuador ; in his 1934 study , Hellmayr treated these species as conspecific . Phylogenetic analysis published in 2009 confirmed the close relationship between the two species ; Bonaccorso speculates that the geographic (and subsequent genetic) separation between these species and others in the *Cyanolyca* genus may have been initiated by the formation of the Río Cauca Valley in western Colombia .

The azure @-@ hooded jay has four subspecies . *Cyanolyca cucullata mitrata* is found in eastern Mexico , from San Luis Potosí to north central Oaxaca . This subspecies was initially treated as a separate species by Ridgway , but it was later merged into the azure @-@ hooded jay . *C. c. guatemalae* ranges from southern Mexico in Chiapas to central Guatemala . *C. c. hondurensis* resides in western Honduras . *C. c. cucullata* , the nominate subspecies , is found in Costa Rica and western Panama .

= = Description = =

The azure @-@ hooded jay ranges in length from 11 to 12 inches (28 to 30 cm) , and it tends to weigh 35 @. @ 2 ounces (1 @, @ 000 g) . Its large size and frame help the bird manage the large amount of flying it does . The adult is dark blue with black on the head and upper chest , while the rear of the crown and nape , or back of the neck , are sky blue with a white border . The legs and bill are black and the eyes are dark red . Both sexes are similar in appearance . Juveniles are duller than adults and their sky blue hood does not possess the white bordering .

Its voice has been described as a loud and bright eihnk @-@ eihnk that is typically repeated four to five times . It is also known to repeat a nasal ehr @-@ ehn or eh ? enk noise twice and give off a low , gruff , hard cheh @-@ r . The alarm and flock @-@ social calls of this species , characterized as a reek ! sound , are " nasal , querulous , and upwardly or double inflected . "

= = Distribution and habitat = =

This species is known from Costa Rica , Guatemala , Honduras , southeastern Mexico , and western Panama . It lives in humid evergreen forests that are sometimes interspersed with pine trees . It can be found at the edges of these forests typically in the middle and higher levels within these trees . It is also normally found only where cloud forest is uninterrupted .

= = Ecology and behavior = =

This corvid is known to join mixed @-@ species flocks with other species including unicolored jays and emerald toucanets . It is also known to travel in groups with two to ten other azure @-@ hooded jays . It is a skulking and secretive species , rarely coming out into the open . Because of this habit ,

the bird is extremely difficult to observe in the wild and not much is known about its ecology . Mates are known to preen each other , a process which entails one bird bending over in front of the other and tugging on its throat feathers . The feathers of the crown are often moving swiftly , and it is believed that the condition of a mate can be determined by this movement .

Like other jays , this species is likely extremely intelligent . Similar species are known to use ants to keep their feathers clean , store seeds and nuts for later consumption , and use their toes to hold food . However , due to its secretive nature , these characteristics have not yet been observed in the species .

The bird 's bright plumage makes it easy for predators to find this species . Whenever the jay feels threatened , it gives off a warning alarm call .

= = = Diet = = =

The azure @-@ hooded jay is omnivorous , eating berries , seeds , and small , dead animals . This species has been known to steal and eat bait from traps set for small mammals . The bird tends to forage in the forest canopy .

= = = Reproduction = = =

The jay ? s nest is typically built 16 @.@ 4 to 23 feet (5 to 7 m) above the ground next to a tree trunk . The base of the azure @-@ hooded jay 's first studied nest was coarsely made out of twigs that were 0 @.@ 08 to 0 @.@ 12 inches (2 to 3 mm) long . That nest was about 4 @.@ 3 inches (11 cm) wide inside and 7 @.@ 4 to 13 inches (19 to 33 cm) wide overall depending on the length of the exterior twigs . The nest is 2 inches (5 cm) deep and has an interior constructed with woven thin fibrils and twigs , and no feathers or other softening devices are used in the nest ? s construction . In addition to building its own nest , this jay is known to reuse old , abandoned nests made by other species . Three to four eggs are normally laid . The young are typically raised in the nest between April and June and they take at least 20 days to fledge . Both parents care for the young and feed them a variety of insects , including katydids . After the young fledge , they stay close to their parents .

= = Conservation = =

This jay is treated as a species of Least Concern , or not threatened with extinction , by BirdLife International due to its large geographical range of about 42 @,@ 500 square miles (110 @,@ 000 km2) , population which , while unsurveyed , is believed to be above 10 @,@ 000 individuals , and lack of a 30 % population decline over the last ten years . However , the azure @-@ hooded jay is uncommon in some parts of its range . It is also believed that deforestation may have an effect on this bird .

= = Relationship with humans = =

Although this species has not been observed doing this , closely related jays are known to destroy and eat human @-@ planted crops such as orchards , cane , pineapples , and potatoes . The azure @-@ hooded jay has appeared on one stamp in Mexico in 1996 .