

a Blue or Steller's jay and once we saw it sharing the suet with an immature Steller's Jay. From 12 to 28 February, the Pinyon Jay frequented the suet ball at our home, as well as our neighbour's feeders and hazelnut bushes located 200 m south of our house. It was always in the company of other jays.

Using a 200-mm lens, we were able to get a series of photographs of the Pinyon Jay (Figure 1) through our kitchen window, which is about a metre from the suet ball.

In March we continued to see a few Steller's and Blue jays in our area, but it was not until 25 March that the Pinyon Jay re-appeared, again in the company of other jays. It was observed feeding at our suet ball in the early morning. Taking a short walk along our rural road, a Steller's and a Blue jay were observed flying from our neighbour's yard carrying a husked or dried hazelnut in the bill. Then, a Blue Jay flew by carrying a small rodent in its bill. The Pinyon Jay called once from a conifer tree then landed in an overgrown patch of dried grasses where two Blue Jays were actively hunting.



Figure 1. First-year Pinyon Jay, Lister, BC. 20 February 2005. (Malcolm Dennington). BC Photo 3141.

Suddenly, the Pinyon Jay grasped a small rodent in its bill then flew out of sight.

At the time of this writing on 5 April 2005 we were still seeing or hearing the Pinyon Jay, almost daily, between our house and the neighbour's to the south. However, this turned out to be the last day the jay was sighted, a stay of 54 days.

Russell P. Balda (pers. comm.) provided the following comments on the jay. "*The bird [Figure 1] is a first-year bird that probably hatched sometime in mid-spring 2004. Pinyon Jays have been "wandering" greatly in North America over the past four years, some moving hundreds of kilometres from their breeding sites. Often jays move in groups, but it is*

PINYON JAY (*GYMNORHINUS CYANOCEPHALUS*): A NEW SPECIES FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Pinyon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) is a North American species that mainly inhabits the lower pine and shrubland habitats in the west-central part of the continent. It is present year-round from central Oregon, southern Idaho, central Montana, western South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska south through California to northern Baja California, southern Nevada, northwestern and east-central Arizona, east-central New Mexico, and western Oklahoma. It winters throughout its breeding range and many adjacent areas, including northern Idaho, southern Washington, and central Montana (Balda 2002).

The Pinyon Jay has not been previously documented in British Columbia. A single record exists for Canada through 2001, a sighting near Eastend, southwestern Saskatchewan, on 16 September 1910 (Potter 1943; Balda 2002).

On 11 February 2005, we observed an immature Pinyon Jay at our bird feeder and suet ball in Lister, BC. It was with a mixed flock of Steller's Jays (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) and Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*), approximately six of each. The Pinyon Jay frequented the suet ball, taking turns feeding with the other jays. Occasionally it was displaced by either

not uncommon for individuals to show up.”

According to a Project Feeder Watch newsletter produced by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology (www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/news/FireDroughtBeetlesBirds.htm) the droughts and fires experienced in the western United States in the last few years have altered some Pinyon Jay habitat, and to a lesser extent Steller’s Jay habitat, driving them in greater numbers to frequent backyard feeders in search of food. Given this loss of habitat, as well as our proximity to northern Idaho (the border is about 5 km from our house) the sighting of a Pinyon Jay is perhaps not all that unexpected.

Literature Cited

Balda, R.P. 2002. Pinyon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 605. (A. Poole and F. Gills, eds). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA. 32 pp.

Potter, L.B. 1943. Bird notes from southwestern Saskatchewan. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 57:69-72.

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About the Authors

Kim and Malcolm are semi-retired wildlife biologists who have been living in the Creston Valley for the past 16 years. They both continue to do some contract and volunteer work in their field and continue to have a keen interest in the natural world.