

BLUE JAY TAKES DEAD SHREW

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Our two housecats are reasonably well fed; still, they often go out hunting. Usually they bring their catch home, depositing mice of various kinds on our patio or doorstep. One Saturday afternoon in October 1986, I looked out the window and noticed that a fairly large shrew had been left on the patio. At this very moment, a Blue Jay flew down and pecked at the dead shrew. Apparently it was to the jay's liking, for it seized the shrew in its bill and flew away with it.

In a discussion with Bob Nero, he suggested that any large shrew in our area is likely to be the fairly common Short-tailed Shrew. Notable for its scent glands, it is seldom eaten by even poorly-fed cats. Birds, relying less on scent, may find shrews perfectly palatable. Great Gray

Owls and other owls, for example, regularly eat shrews. Recently, a Gray Jay was observed capturing a small mammal, possibly a shrew.² Publication of this record suggests that this is a relatively rare trait in jays.

To my surprise, the omnivorous Blue Jay will occasionally prey on small mammals. Bob Nero tells me that in 1897, biologist Foster Beal reported that a captive Blue Jay "showed a marked fondness for mice, and would devour them apparently with great relish."¹ Presumably these were dead mice. In 1918, G. Gill saw a Blue Jay attempting to capture a live mouse, pecking at it as it ran. The mouse darted into a shed and escaped even after a second Blue Jay joined in the chase.¹

¹ BENT, A.C. 1964. Life histories of North American jays, crows and titmice. Part 2. Reprinted, Dover Publications, Inc. N.Y. 214 pp.

² LESHER, F. and J. LESHER. 1984. Gray Jay takes live mammal. *Loon* 56:72-73.



Blue Jay

Wayne Shiels/Four Winds Prairie Photography