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Van Dyke in his search for nests of warbler birds in Crawford County and
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KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

Lawrence H. Walkinshaw

During late May 1931, Dr. R.E. Olsen, A.D. Tinker and I went to
Lovells, Crawford County, Michigan for the first time, primarily to
study Kirtland's Warbler (Dendroica Kirtlandii). My mission was to
become acquainted with the bird, to see if it was possible to locate
a nest; and possibly to get some photographs of this very rare bird.

On 30 May I found some 17 singing males; on 31 May a female building
a nest; and later during the summer Richard Olsen and I managed to get
some black and white HITE photographs of the birds feeding young at a second
nest we found on 16 June.

During 1932, I was married so my wife and I visited the Kirtland's
Warbler region again late in May and then found two new colonies, one
just west of Red Oak, Oscoda County; a second one and one-half miles
NE of Lovells in the same region of the present day Muskrat Lake colony.
During the latter part of June I found a nest here and secured some
photographs of a very tame female bird which I also captured and
banded, apparently the first one ever banded.

During 1933 I saw two more Kirtland's Warbler nests and Al Dowding
and I searched for the species across the upper peninsula of Michigan
and through the jack pines in the Spooner, Wisconsin region. We found
no birds in these regions. During 1938 I found three nests 2½ miles
west of Lake Margrethe near Highway 72 where there were many small
jack pines. I had located this colony during mid May, 1937 when I saw
my earliest for the year Male Kirtland's Warbler, on 13 May.

Subsequently I studied the bird in many regions in Crawford, Oscoda,
Montmorency, Presque Isle, Kalkaska and Iosco counties. When the first
count of singing males was made during the summer of 1951, I worked in
Iosco and all the western counties but found birds only in the Iosco

County region. During 1954 and 1955 a group of us aided Dr. Josselyn Van Tyne in his search for nests of maked birds in Crawford County and some in the Mack Lake region. After his death in January 1957 many of us worked in the Mack Lake region and had many nests of banded birds there.

For several years following the publication of the Kirtland's Warbler book by Harold Mayfield, no one did much work on the species. The 1961 showed the species was holding it's own, possibly increasing a little for we came up with around & 500 singing males. During late June and early July 1966, Bill Coates wanted me to go with them to the Artillery Range to photograph the birds. We had a group, mostly photographers, Bill Dyer, Kenneth and Harriet Krum, Bill Coates and myself. Bill Dyer and I found three nests. I located several other pairs feeding fledged young and in all cases the only offspring from any of these nests, except one nest, were Cowbirds.

From the one nest two young Kirtland's Warblers fledged. Five other nests, fledged only 6 Cowbirds while another had three Cowbird eggs only. When we left the region it was evident, the Kirtland's Warbler was in trouble.

Never before had I seen such parasitism. During our studies on the same region, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970 and 1971, this became very evident. Nearly every other species of bird nesting in the same region also seemed immune to parasitism aslo. Cowbirds were almost definitely selective in their host, and that host was Kirtland's Warbler. Definitely Cowbirds had increased in Kirtland's Warbler nesting regions. Only seven of 29 nests, 1931-1955 had been parasitized yet parasitism during 1969, 1970 and 1971 was 77.7, 68.7 and 69.2 per cent, 27 of 38 nests being parasitized. On top of this there had been an increase in Blue Jays and there were still present in many nesting regions red squirrels, 13-lined ground squirrels and garter snakes. All of these were possible predators and since then we have had positive evidence that all of them took Kirtland's Warbler eggs or young.

I watched a Blue Jay remove and devour two nestling Cowbirds from one

Kirtland's Warbler nest in 1967 while Warren Faust and I found a Blue Jay in the act of destroying young Kirtland's Warblers in another nest 24 June 1974. In the latter case the young were ready to fledge so three young fledged while the Blue Jay was killing a fourth. Possibly there could have been a fifth nestling before our arrival. The Blue Jay flew away and the young Kirtland's Warbler died in my hand. Dr. Leighton Smith (verbal, and letter) watched a 13-lined ~~red~~ ground squirrel carry a nestling Kirtland's Warbler from another nest which later lost all of its nestlings. I examined another Kirtland's Warbler nest one day and an hour later happened to cross near the nest again, noting a red squirrel running away from it. On the first visit, it had had two nestling Cowbirds; on the second visit it was empty - one hour later. Dr. Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. and a class of ornithology students found one of my marked Kirtland's Warbler nests 1 July 1972. I had banded 5 nestlings 27 June. On 1 July they found the adult birds very agitated and soon found the empty nest and then a garter snake from which they squeezed three banded nestlings from the above nest. A fourth was found dead beside the nest but the fifth was not located. These predators have not decreased on the nesting colony at the Artillery Range and each year I find several Blue Jay nests scattered throughout the region even though many are captured in the Cowbird traps, evidence points that nesting birds do not enter the Cowbird traps. Many of the Blue Jays captured are migratory apparently.

When during 1971 Harold Mayfield conducted again a Kirtland's Warbler singing male survey with the aid of a large group, we came up with 201 singing males as compared to 502 in 1961. Definitely the greatest loss of birds must have been because the birds were not rearing Kirtland's Warblers. They were rearing chiefly Cowbirds. During 1971, 62 of these singing males were on my study area, the

Artillery Range, about 10-12 mi NE of Grayling.

This region was produced during a fire created by artillery fire, 19 August 1955. The fire definitely started either in section 1 or 12, Town 27 North, Range 3 West and the wind must have been between west north west and north west for it burned over much of sections 7, 8, 9, and 16 and parts of sections 15 and 17, Town 27 North, Range 2 West burning an area over one mile wide in many places and some four and one-half miles to five miles long. This grew immediately into one of the best if not the best region for Kirtland's Warblers ever known. It has been known to harbor more singing males than any on record. At its peak there could have been up to 100 singing males there since it had passed its peak in 1971 when there were 62 singing males there and the north half had been reburned during April 1967 when a second fire of similar origin ran rampant from west to east over the north half or sections 7, 8 and 9. Fenn Holden found the first Kirtland's Warblers on this region during the 1961 ~~Kirtland's Warbler~~-survey when he counted 4 singing males and found a nest with 4 eggs on 27 June.

During 1966 when we first visited the region, the jack pines were at an optimum height, about five to six feet. When I stood in any region, I could look over the tree tops in any direction where the terrain was favorable.

We knew in 1971, as the trees became taller, it had passed its optimum for the trees were getting too tall, the ground cover underneath was slowly disappearing and accordingly the number of Kirtland's Warblers continued annually to disappear. But accordingly new birds began showing up on the 1967 burn. Here during 1972 Ron Hoffman found one singing male during late June and Warren Faust and I found 8 singing males there and during 1973 this had doubled. during 1974 ~~44~~ had doubled.