

MEMORANDUM

TO: Aileen Bainton, Eric Carey, Paul Dean, Mike DeCapita, Rex Ennis, Phil Huber, Dave Lee, Dave Mehlman, Rick Oliver, Eve Rolandson, Jerry Weinrich

FROM: Dave Ewert

DATE: July 25, 1997

SUBJECT: Synopsis of Michigan trip, June 22-30, 1997

Between June 22-30, 1997 we toured northern Michigan to become more familiar with conservation issues associated with this species and its habitat. Although the trip was obviously focused on breeding ground considerations, and becoming more familiar with the bird, we had many opportunities to discuss conservation issues in the Bahamas as well. The packet of information distributed at the beginning of the trip should provide all with a list of participants in the group and included much additional information. An updated list of participants is enclosed.

The purpose of the trip was (1) to develop working relationships between those working on Kirtland's Warblers in Michigan and the Bahamas, (2) to provide as many opportunities as possible to see and hear Kirtland's Warblers and associated species, (3) to observe ecosystem management practices and ecotourism/educational programs, and (4) to observe how organizations cooperate to protect Kirtland's Warblers.

Each participating organization in Michigan played a key role in designing and implementing the tour. The Huron-Manistee National Forest obtained free housing for 4 nights at Garland Resort for the group, provided staff time to lead field tours to land managed for Kirtland's Warblers and to view a prairie restoration site, led a tour of Mack Lake area to view Kirtland's Warblers and review habitat requirements of the species, and hosted an evening barbeque. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources provided a flight over the Kirtland's Warbler management areas and thus a landscape perspective of habitat use and management; they also provided expertise on park management, specific management methods used to manage and monitor Piping Plovers, and organized a session on nature-based tourism (ecotourism) with local Chamber of Commerces. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permitted the group to help band Kirtland's Warblers. The National Park Service gave the group a tour of protection work related to Piping Plovers at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. The Nature Conservancy's Michigan field office coordinated the trip and Wings of the Americas program of The Nature Conservancy provided funds for airfare, food and lodging for Bahamian representatives during the

Therefore, the foundation of the conservation linkage lies both on a unique bird species and on a set of similar ecosystems, which are necessary to sustain both the Kirtland's Warbler and a wide variety of other species dependent on it.

Ecotourism

The area of Michigan where the warbler nests has an active ecotourism industry which can be linked with such ecotourism destination points as Point Pelee, Ontario, Canada and Whitefish Point, Michigan. Basically, anyone who wants to see a Kirtland's Warbler must come to either Mio or Grayling, Michigan, and take a tour sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This generates local income and stimulates local interest for the warbler and the jack pine ecosystem. The Bahamas also have potential for ecotourism; the Rand Nature Centre of the Bahamas National Trust and Bahamian government are considering ways to approach this issue. Avid birders must come to the Bahamas to see endemic species (though Kirtland's Warbler is difficult to find in winter). Development of ecotourism has the potential to increase the perceived value of wildlife and wildlands of the Bahamas to local people.

Training

The major gap in our knowledge of the Kirtland's Warbler is in understanding its distribution and abundance on the wintering grounds in the Bahamas. This gap extends so far as to contribute to uncertainty as to exactly what major habitat types are used by the species. The most urgent need is the development of a reliable winter census protocol and the application of it so that priorities for conservation action in the Bahamas can be developed. Census work is most likely to succeed if Bahamians undertake such surveys. In this light, the ability to actually see a Kirtland's Warbler in Michigan is essential to help find it in the Bahamas. This is due both to the difficulty in detecting them in the Bahamas and the potential for confusion with similar species in the same habitat. A nucleus of highly-trained Bahamians can train others. Development of a rigorous census methodology would also allow the accurate inventory of other bird species of concern in the target habitats.

Education

Local people in Michigan need to fully appreciate the ecological importance of the jack pine ecosystem and the economic opportunities provided by the warbler as do Bahamians for their pine ecosystem, which may include habitat for rare and endangered species as well as a source of wood and water, both potentially sustainable resources.

Action steps

1. Training. Coordinators: Rick Oliver (Grand Bahama) and Eric Carey (New Providence) with Dave Lee. Working with Paul Dean and support from others as needed. Major objective is to train a select group of volunteers in the Bahamas to reliably identify Kirtland's Warblers in winter. This will be a collaborative effort between Bahamas National Trust, Department of Agriculture and North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences especially. Several tasks were identified by the group: (1) Locate the needed, reliable volunteers who are willing to follow survey protocol, (2) Ensure protocol is closely coordinated between volunteers on Grand Bahama and New Providence (these 2 islands were selected as the best places to start training because of the availability of both trainers and trainees and the islands contain habitats we wish to sample: pine forests, coppice and scrub and (3) consider additional training session for Bahamians in Michigan if more volunteer trainers are needed. Need to obtain at least the following supplies for training: slides of immature/female plumage Kirtland's Warblers and species that could be confused with Kirtland's Warblers (Magnolia, Palm, Prairie, Yellow-throated, Yellow-rumped, and Cape May Warblers; maybe Olive-capped Warbler?); tape recordings of song and calls of Kirtland's Warblers and similar species; color-laminated pictures of this same set of species for use in the field.

Schedule: Training protocol to be done by Sept. 1997

Training to be done by Nov. 1997

2. Survey work. In progress (Dave Lee, Rick Oliver, Phil Huber, Mike DeCapita) and will include surveying efforts for Kirtland's Warblers and Bahamian birds (a combination of transect work to locate Kirtland's Warblers (and also rare resident species) coupled with point counts for all species). Dave Lee, Joe Wunderle, and Dave Ewert to collaborate on design with review by Paul Dean, Chris Haney (Wilderness Society), Dave Mehlman, Rick Oliver, Tony White. Dave Lee to be overall coordinator of survey work in the Bahamas and work with others to ensure all equipment, supplies, training etc. completed and ready by survey time. Time of survey work yet to be decided (seemed to be centering on early Dec 1997 or March 1998). Also need to decide how to manage those interested in volunteer for survey work on islands other than Grand Bahama or New Providence in first year. Plant sampling work at point count stations to be coordinated by Dave Lee through an Ohio university. Need to define role of College of Bahamas for this project. Eric Carey will ensure all participants have research permits as needed. Data analysis and storage discussed - both Dave Lee and Eric expressed interest in helping with various aspects of this part of the project. This collaborative project will involve Department of Agriculture, Bahamas, Bahamas National Trust, the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team, The Nature Conservancy, North

Page 7

yield the results we seek. If survey work does not yield enough data we have agreed that this aspect of the project needs critical review.

Eric Carey plans to give a presentation on the trip at the Society of Caribbean Ornithology meetings in Aruba in August.

I hope this synopsis is accurate and complete. Please let me know of any changes you would like to see. We need to identify someone who can assume the role of coordinating the winter survey in the Bahamas similar to the role I played here in Michigan.