

First Record of Kirtland's Warbler for Grand Traverse County

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While conducting a Breeding Bird Survey on 23 June 2002, R.

Brigham found a singing male Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) in Union Twp., Grand Traverse Co., MI. He reported the sighting on Mich-Listers, a list-based email rare bird server. I verified the sighting for the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team on 26 June. I searched for about 45 minutes before hearing the bird sing.

The warbler sang an atypical song, similar to the wren-like chatter song only more slurred with several extra notes. A typical Kirtland's Warbler song consists of 3 slow, clear notes, followed by 5 quicker, sharper notes with the end note lower pitched similar to a Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) (M. Petrucha pers. obs.). It would sing several times and then be silent for periods of about 5 minutes. The bird moved around quite a bit, usually remaining confined to the tops of the trees. It sang almost exclusively from the scattered Jack Pines.

The warbler was in unusual habitat, which consisted of a Red Pine (*Pinus resinosa*/ Jack Pine (*Pinus banksiana*) plantation that was approximately 90 percent Red Pine. The trees were 6-8 ft (1.5-2 m) in height and medium stocked, with the lower branches not touching the ground. The soil was sandy, and the ground cover was sparse, without some of the ground cover species, structure, and density found in typical Kirtland's Warbler breeding habitat. Typical Kirtland's Warbler breeding habitat consists of sandy soils with well stocked (denser) stands of 5-16 ft (1.5-5 m) tall Jack Pine with branches touching the ground, some cherry (*Prunus spp.*), oak (*Quercus spp.*), and scattered grassy openings (Mayfield 1992).

The bird was unbanded. I observed this bird for 45 minutes and saw no evidence of a female or nest. Probst and Hayes (1987) found all mates of male Kirtland's Warblers in 60 minutes or less of observation time, and concluded that open habitats should make detection of mates or fledglings easier. As this habitat was fairly open, the observation time should have been sufficient to detect a female if present. The warbler was in sight virtually all the time I was there, and was not seen carrying food. Food carrying was observed in several

other bird species. The warbler was overall duller in color, and had less prominent streaking on the sides than a typical male Kirtland's, which suggests this was a second year male (J. Probst unpubl. data). Young birds tend to wander in search of new habitat (Morton 1992), which helps to explain why this bird was in non-typical habitat. Bocetti (1993) captured a hatching year Kirtland's Warbler in mixed coniferous-deciduous secondary growth surrounded by mature coniferous growth.

The warbler was originally discovered by Bob Carstens on 17 June 2002 (B. Carstens pers. comm.). The bird was not found on 1 July (J. Wuepper Michigan Rare Bird Alert) or on 2 July (J. Weinrich pers. comm.). Because the date of this sighting was within the Kirtland's Warbler census period, it was included in the 2002 Kirtland's Warbler census results (Weinrich 2002). There have been no summer records of Kirtland's Warbler (Mayfield 1960, Walkinshaw 1983), or migration records (Petrucha and Sykes unpubl. data), for Grand Traverse Co. This represents the first documented sighting for Grand Traverse Co.

Another male Kirtland's Warbler was located in the same stand during the 2003 census on 12 June 2003 (R. Earle pers. comm.). On 14 June, I went back to the stand to try to verify if it was the same bird as last year. This year's bird, which was located in the same section of the stand as last years, was unbanded. It had a more typical song, with only the end note missing, so it is unknown if the 2003 bird was the 2002 bird returning.

I observed the bird from 0730 to 0900 EST. It spent the majority of its time in the scattered Jack Pine, flying from one patch to another, where it spent its time in the upper half of the trees singing, branch gleaning Lepidoptera larva, preening, and fly catching. The bird only landed in red pine twice, each time for less than 2 minutes. Once, it flew into a Pin Cherry (*P. pennsylvanica*), where it foraged in the lower branches catching an adult cicada (*Magicalada spp.*). The cicada was consumed by beating it on the ground and hammering with its bill until the cicada's wings were removed. The entire process took about 5 minutes. No mention of cicadas as prey by Kirtland's was found in studies by DeLoria (2000) or Fussman (1997); or in Mayfield's (1960) book. Consumption of cicadas has only been reported one other time, with no details (Walkinshaw 1983). The bird had a bright yellow breast, and more prominent streaking than the 2002 bird, indicating an after second year male.

As in 2002, there was no evidence of a female or nest in 2003. This Kirtland's spent little time down low in the trees and was visible most of the time I was present. The bird did chase a male Yellow-rumped Warbler (*D. coronata*) away, presumably out of the Kirtland's territory.

A singing male Kirtland's Warbler was found on the census 9 June 2004 in the same area as 2002 and 2003 (E. Carlson pers. comm.). I went to the territory on 24 July, but could not locate any adult or young Kirtland's in 1.5

hours of searching.

As none of the birds were banded, it is unknown if the sightings represent 1 individual, or more. The habitat was marginal, and there never appeared to be a mate, so the sightings are likely 1 individual returning to an area discovered during post-fledging dispersal. The nearest occupied breeding area from the Grand Traverse Co. site is 6 mi (9.6 km) northeast. There is no clear cut reason why an apparently unmated male would continue to return to such marginal habitat. Perhaps as the Kirtland's population is continuing to grow, prime habitat is becoming saturated, and the bird is settling for marginal habitat.

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