

Kirtland's Warbler file

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LAST SURVIVORS

The Natural History of Animals
in Danger of Extinction

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Preface by H. R. H. The Prince of the Netherlands
President of the World Wildlife Fund



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In 1930, 65 in 1934 and 100 at the end of 1935. At the beginning of 1936, there were 250 to 300 individuals, of which a hundred breeders remained after the spring dispersal and counting was over. Furthermore, the ponds scattered over the plain make excellent water supplies for waterfowl. The Eagle Lake Sanctuary is an achievement which may serve as an example: its creation has not only saved the southern race of the prairie chicken from extinction, but also preserved a natural environment of great interest.

To complete the story, mention must be made of the lesser prairie chicken, which many ornithologists consider to be a separate species *Tympanuchus pallasirostris*, but which others regard as a geographic subspecies of the prairie chicken. It occurs in New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and northern Texas. Although it does not appear to be in any immediate danger, its numbers have already substantially decreased. The conservation of its habitat should be considered while there is still time.

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

Dendroica kirtlandii

Almost all the species of songbirds threatened with extinction live on islands, where their decline, in common with other types of fauna, has been caused mainly by changes in their natural habitat and the introduction of foreign animals upsetting the ancient balance of nature. Some continental species appear to have been always numerically few and very limited in range, either because of a special preference for an ecologically restricted breeding area, or for unknown reasons, apparently unrelated to human influence. At least two examples belong to the large family of Vireonidae, the American warblers.

This species is nearly extinct, wrapped in mystery and nothing can be done.

On the other hand, the case history of the Kirtland's warbler has a happy ending. On May 13th, 1851, an unknown singer was captured on the shores of Lake Erie near Cleveland, Ohio, and given to the naturalist J. P. Kirtland. He, in turn, gave to it the name of *Sialia kirtlandii* in honor of his friend. Later incorporated in the genus *Dendroica*, the new species was to remain a warbler for more than half a century.

The most incomplete knowledge of the Bachman's warbler (*Dendroica bachmani*) discovered in 1833 in New York and described by Audubon, showed that it was occasionally and isolated breeding withered from time to time in as many as ten different states, situated between Arkansas, Louisiana and Virginia. Some wintering birds were found also in Florida and Cuba.

An amazing accident concerns the fact that a specimen had already been collected ten years earlier, in October 1841, Samuel Cabel, on an expedition to Yucatan, had picked it up on board his ship off the Bahamas. The specimen remained forgotten in a drawer of his collection until 1865. In the event, the winter quarters of this rare bird were discovered in the Bahamas in January, 1879.

The natural habitat of Bachman's Warbler is an swampy river edge, evidently rapidly dwindling.

Over the years, a certain number of migrating birds were recorded between the Great Lakes and Florida, but the breeding sites were unknown until 1939, in that year, E. J. Frothingham, being for

even so, no one had discovered. Nobody had seen an ordinary rare little bird, but a subtle and fatal appearance of a new and valuable population was existing. The

was able to find the first nest in a stand of oak

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