



**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION**

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March 12, 1998

To: Rebecca Humphries, Chief, Wildlife Division

From: Jerry Weinrich, Wildlife Habitat/Research Biologist

Subject: Bahamas Connection - Kirtland's Warbler

From February 19 through March 3, 1998, I was very fortunate to be able to visit Freeport and Grand Bahama island. I represented Wildlife Division and our Department in a group of U.S. biologists and birders who went there to search for the Kirtland's warbler, to encourage government and local support for protection of the warbler and its winter habitat, and to enlist and train Bahamian volunteers to increase search efforts in the future. This effort in the Bahamas was led by Dave Ewert and Dave Mehlman of The Nature Conservancy and by Dave Lee of the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences. The group included representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (DeCapita), U.S. Forest Service (Huber), The Wilderness Society (Haney), and two volunteers (Powless, Sears). Bahamas residents we worked with represented the Bahamas Department of Agriculture (Carey), Bahamas Department of Lands and Surveys (Russell), Rand Nature Center/Bahamas National Trust (R. and K. Oliver) and at least 10 private citizens/volunteers (including P. Dean).

The attached itinerary for February 19-27 was followed fairly closely. In spite of some less than ideal weather (rain and wind), we searched for Kirtlands every day from the 20th through the 27th. I stayed on after the rest of the group left (until March 3) and worked with a volunteer (Lloyd Cheong) and Rick and Kathy Oliver (who most graciously put me up at their home for that period).

The group recorded five (5) possible sightings of Kirtland's warblers during the first week of searching, all in stands of Caribbean pine which covers most of Grand Bahama's 700+ square miles (I saw 2 of these "possibles"). The Kirtlands does not sing at this time of year, so we tried to attract them with recordings of their song and by "spishing". We also checked flowering stalks of the agave (century plant) which are known to attract a number of nectar and insect eating birds, reportedly including the Kirtland's. We also keyed in on blue-gray gnatcatchers (my idea) which behave much like our chickadees. Often (as with chickadees in Michigan in August and September), a mixed group of warblers and other birds followed the gnatcatchers. Future

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searches will probably be facilitated by playing recordings of gnatcatchers to attract other birds, hopefully including the Kirtland's.

From February 28 through March 2, I searched every day with no success. Although I had to be at the airport at 8:00am for my return flight on March 3, Rick Oliver and I decided to give it one last try. At 7:30am we made a positive sighting of a Kirtland's (the first bird we saw after I started spishing)! We were less than two (2) miles from the Rand Nature Center (where the Olivers live) and less than five (5) miles from the airport. Such is luck! (Sighting record attached.)

In all, I spent some 45 hours walking, "spishing", and looking for Kirtlands with two (2) possible and one (1) positive sighting. Hopefully, playback of gnatcatcher calls will improve the sighting rate for future surveyors (of which I'd like to be one).

In spite of limited success in finding Kirtland's warblers in the Bahamas, much more important progress was probably made in developing and fostering relationships with representatives of the Bahamian government, the Bahamas National Trust, and the private citizens with whom we worked. Dave Ewert deserves a lot of credit for all his efforts at facilitating this whole venture. It has been very much a pleasure for me to have been involved.

Attached also for your information are some additional correspondence, instructions, forms, pamphlets, map, and newspaper clippings.

JW:cr

cc: Rabe  
Rustem  
Weise  
Matthews  
Hendrickson  
Ewert

