

The following letter was written by G. W. Irvine to the son of Robert Radtke on August 14, 2007. It is a great synopsis of Bob Radtke's contribution to the Kirtland's Warbler program.

Hi John,

Your email concerning your dad's work on the recovery of the Kirtland's Warbler (KW) eventually got to me after passing through several people that think I can give you the most information on Bob's contributions to the recovery of the KW, since we worked together on the KW Recovery Plan, and other wildlife projects.

Bob and I joined the USFS about the same time, he on the Huron-Manistee National Forest (H-M) and I on the Ottawa NF in the UP, eh. At the urging of several ornithologists from bird groups, universities, etc. to establish areas on public forest lands that would be managed for KW nesting habitat. A MI state biologist had four such areas approved for this purpose on state forests in the late 50s. Bob had defined such an area in the Mack Lake area (ML) of the (H-M), which was approved in 1960. A 500 acre stand of jack pine on (ML) was logged, leaving seed trees, and then burned in 1964 to obtain natural seeding. This treatment worked and was occupied by nesting KWs in 1970. Bob was transferred to Milwaukee before the burn but it was his plan.

Vern Stricker was moved in to fill the H-M biologist when Bob left. Vern left the H-M in 1965 and I was transferred to the H-M in 1965. I picked up on the KW plans and carried them on. I also checked other jack pine stands (wild fires) on the H-M, looking for KWs.

In 1971, the third census of singing male KWS was conducted. It was found that their numbers had declined 60% from the count made in 1961 (500 down to 200). John Byelich and I got the group of ornithologists together that fall to start a strategy to try to reverse this trend. These efforts centered on expanding KW nesting habitat and controlling the cowbirds which lay their eggs in the nests of KWs and other birds. This had reduced the survival of nestlings to an average of less than one per nest.

The Endangered Species Act was signed in to law by the President in 1973. Bob worked from his position on getting this law passed and the KW being immediately placed on the endangered species (ES) list, as were other species with low populations.

A key point of this law required that a recovery team for each ES be appointed. The charge to the team was to draft a recovery plan and plan a strategy to increase the population to a non-endangered, self sustaining status. Your dad and I were appointed to represent the FS view to the team. Two persons from the MI DNR, two from the Fish and Wildlife Service, and Harold Mayfield, the

author of a monograph on the KW based on the study undertaken by the late Josselyn Van Tyne, Curator of Birds at the U of Mich. These seven made up the KW Recovery Team.

Various aspects of the planning were assigned to persons with a knowledge or past experience in certain aspects of KW biology or management. Your dad, Nels Johnson, DNR and I were assigned to writing the habitat aspects, Wes Jones and Bill Shake, both FWS to write cowbird control and protection regulations, H. Mayfield wrote the public relations techniques and was an advisor to the team, and John Byelich was Team Leader. Bob Radtke also expedited the typing and printing and served as a liaison with agency Administrators. Bob's knowledge and abilities of "getting things done" were of great value in a good recovery plan written. We all had great respect for him. His finger prints can be found on many of the wildlife projects in the Eastern Region.

I had been retired for several years when Consumers Power was required to renew their permit to operate the hydro-dams on the Michigan Rivers. Their environmental scientist, Gary Dawson asked me if I would write the wildlife part of the impact of their dams and management of the adjacent lands. I really wasn't interested. Gary asked me if I could recommend anyone. We went over several names but none appealed. He asked about Bob. I said that there was no one who could do a better job of this kind, but he has moved to Oregon. You would have to talk with him, which he did. Bob accepted the offer and came back temporarily and Gary was very pleased with the product.

I was very shocked when I heard Bob had died, but that is all I could learn. I have tried to get more details of his death. I would appreciate it if you would give me more details.

Sincerely,

Bill Irvine

Louise Clemency,

I was delighted to read the story in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel this weekend concerning the recent discovery of the Kirtland Warbler in Wisconsin. When I was a kid sitting around the dinner table, I remember my dad Robert (Bob) Radtke discussing how he was working to save the Kirtland Warbler. I was just curious if you knew my father or know of his work on this project.

Thanks

John Radtke
Nashotah, WI