

## The Kirtland's Warbler

### HISTORY

The Kirtland's Warbler was first made known from a specimen taken on May 13, 1851, near Cleveland, Ohio, and turned over by J.P. Kirtland to Spencer F. Baird, who described it. An earlier specimen had been taken by Samuel Cabot, Jr. on shipboard "between Abaco and Cuba" in October, 1841, but lay unnoticed for 24 years.

The winter home of the bird was found to be in the Bahama Islands by Charles B. Cory in 1879.

The nesting ground was discovered in northern Lower Michigan in July, 1903, by Norman A. Wood.

### THE NESTING GROUND

A census of the Kirtland's Warbler in 1951 showed that there were fewer than 1,000 individuals of the species. All the nests in history have been found in 12 adjacent counties in northern Lower Michigan.

Under natural conditions the Kirtland's Warbler nests only in extensive stands of small jack pines.

The habitat of the Kirtland's Warbler is produced only by forest fire. Jack Pine cones enclose the seeds in tight, resinous jackets, which neither rot nor open easily. The cones may lie on the ground dormant or cling to branches tightly closed for several years but fire helps them to pop open and release their seeds.

### MISCELLANEOUS NOTES ON BEHAVIOR

Compared to most other wood warblers, the Kirtland's Warbler is quite tame, but individuals vary greatly in this respect.

In the face of danger the Kirtland's Warbler according to circumstances (1) flees, (2) attacks, (3) freezes, or (4) gives distraction display.

It is a tail-wagging species, and normally progresses on the ground by hopping, in spite of references in the literature to its "walking."

The female on the nest dozes in daytime with her head pointing forward, but at night tucks her head back among her scapular feathers.

### NESTING PERIOD

About three-fourths of all Kirtland's Warblers hatch in the period June 12 to 26.

Both adults feed the young. They carry large amounts of food in their bills on each trip, and average 2 to 7 trips per hour until the last two or three days of the nesting period.

Young Kirtland's Warblers usually leave the nest at nine days of age. Their first movement from the nest is by flight.

### SONG

Singing is performed exclusively by adult males in the breeding season. The song is loud and clear, and lasts about one second. The quality and pattern suggests most closely the songs of the Northern Waterthrush and the House Wren.

Males are singing in migration before they reach the nesting grounds, and they continue to sing until about the time of the post nuptial molt, in July or early August. Most singing takes place in the morning before 11 o'clock, but there is some singing at all hours until about half an hour before sunset.

## THE COWBIRD

The Brown-headed Cowbird, a major depressing factor on the population of Kirtland's Warblers, was originally a bird of the short-grass prairies.

About 55 per cent of Kirtland's Warbler nests are parasitized by the cowbird. The female cowbird probably finds most nests by watching the warblers build them. She shows ability to discriminate between her own and Kirtland's Warbler eggs, for she takes only warbler eggs, though never the sole egg in a nest. If the nest has several eggs she is likely to destroy more than one.

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Birds nesting on Kirtland's Warbler areas and found on at least 8 out of 10 such areas are:

Common Nighthawk	Robin
Yellow-shafted Flicker	Hermit Thrush
Eastern Kingbird	Eastern Bluebird
Blue Jay	Brown-headed Cowbird
Common Crow	Vesper Sparrow
Black-capped Chickadee	Slate-colored Junco
Brown Thrasher	Chipping Sparrow

Birds nesting on Kirtland's Warbler areas and found on at least 3 out of 10 such areas are:

Upland Plover	Myrtle Warbler
Mourning Dove	Pine Warbler
Tree Swallow	Prairie Warbler
House Wren	Ovenbird
Black-billed Cuckoo	Rufous-sided Towhee
Black-and-white Warbler	Clay-colored Sparrow
Nashville Warbler	Field Sparrow

Birds we have not found nesting in a Kirtland's Warbler area but have seen on at least 3 out of 10 such areas are:

Red-tailed Hawk	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Marsh Hawk	Indigo Bunting
Eastern Wood Pewee	Purple Finch
Cedar Waxwing	American Goldfinch
Red-eyed Vireo	Song Sparrow
Black-throated Green Warbler	