

Kirtland's warbler beginning to branch out

All known nests of endangered birds were in Michigan, until last year

If your plans for a winter get-away include the Bahamas, keep your eyes open for one of the rarest breeding songbirds in North America.

The entire population of the endangered Kirtland's warbler is thought to spend the winter months on the country's many islands, with Eleuthera holding perhaps the most.

The little warblers have twice rebounded from dangerously low numbers.

In 1974 and again in 1987 just 167 singing males were confirmed in the wild, all in north-central Michigan.

Until two years ago, all known nests also were in Michigan. That changed in 2007 when a nesting pair was confirmed in Ontario at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa, east of Algonquin Park. This year another pair nested at the base.

"A male was discovered for the first time in 2006 as part of a Kirtland's warbler survey" conducted at CFB Petawawa said Tammy Richard, wildlife species at risk biologist, Department of National Defence, CFB Petawawa. Richard and Dr. Paul Aird made the discovery.

Altogether, three males were found on the base in 2006 and one was banded.

"One pair nested last year," said Richard. "Four eggs were laid and two hatched. The remaining eggs (and nest) were donated to the Royal Ontario Museum."

WingBeat



LIONEL GOULD

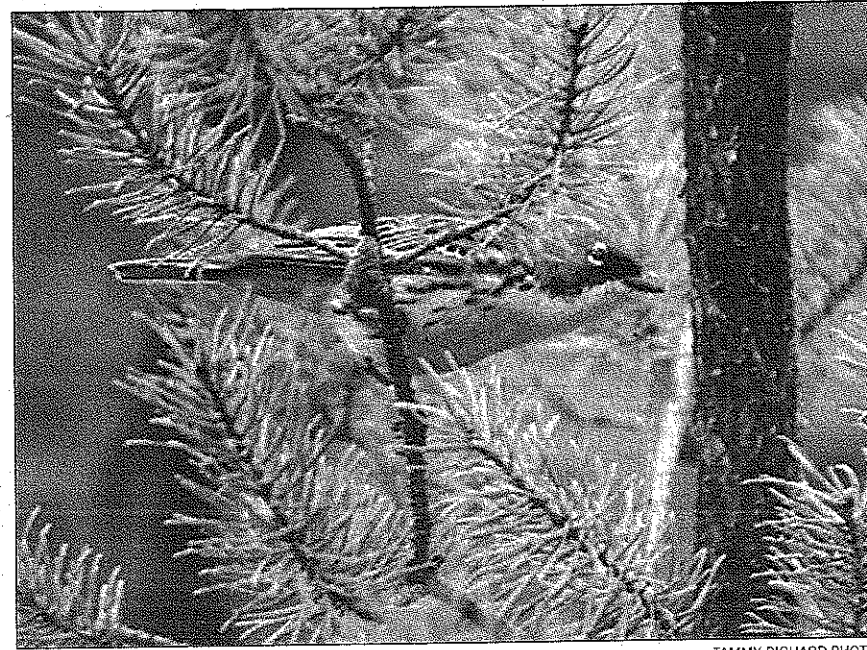
This was the first Kirtland's warbler nest confirmed in Ontario and Canada in 62 years.

This year's nesting pair included the "male banded in 2006," said Richard. The species is known for its site fidelity. At the time of the nest discovery, "the female was not banded and presumably was new to Petawawa." The pair produced four chicks, "all were banded and as far as we can tell all fledged," said Richard.

Kirtland's warblers are grey above with yellow throats and breasts and have a broken white eye-ring. They nest exclusively in young jack pine forests where trees are predominantly four to 20 years old. Forest fires historically maintained perfect habitat naturally. As we've learned to control forest fires, we've diminished the warbler's habitat.

Brown-headed cowbirds, a brood parasite that lays its eggs in the nests of other birds, also reduced the warbler's nesting success in Michigan.

"This practice by cowbirds usually results in adult Kirtland's warblers hatching and raising cowbirds instead of their own young," according to a news release by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Studies have shown



TAMMY RICHARD PHOTO

A banded male Kirtland's warbler in alternate plumage at CFB Petawawa.

the presence of any cowbird eggs in a nest greatly decreased the likelihood that warblers will live to the nestling stage."

In Michigan, biologists and others have protected 140,000 acres of prime jack pine habitat, now known as the Kirtland's Warbler Management Area. Forestry management was introduced to maintain young jack pines and brown-headed cowbirds are thwarted each summer either by removing their eggs from the warblers' nests or by live-trapping and releasing them elsewhere.

"No cowbirds were detected on the property" at Petawawa said Richard.

"A protection zone was established for the warblers to ensure that military training did not disturb the birds. The

return of the Kirtland's Warbler and successful nesting on military lands is encouraging from both a conservation and military perspective."

The CFB Petawawa Kirtland's Warbler Survey and Monitoring program is part of a larger species at risk program occurring on DND lands, one of a multitude of environmental programs being implemented by DND.

During the field survey years for the recently published Breeding Bird Atlas of Ontario, 2001-2005, I did the surveying within the Land Force Central Area Training Centre Meaford. It meant quite a drive for me, but I enjoyed the experience tremendously. I can vouch that the military was co-operative and supportive. Sometimes I'd have to reschedule a survey and cer-

tain areas were off-limits, but both were minor inconveniences considering I was essentially a distraction for them.

The 2007 Kirtland's warbler census (most recent) found approximately 1,700 singing males on territory, including eight in Wisconsin and the two in Ontario. With a growing population in Michigan, some of the warblers are dispersing further west and east. We may see more of them next year in Ontario.

According to Audrey Heagy, bird conservation planning biologist, Bird Studies Canada, "there are historical records of Kirtland's warblers on the Bruce Peninsula, though there isn't a lot of good jack pine habitat there now."

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While leading a Bruce Birding Club outing Wednesday, Judy Duncan and 18 other birders found a rare olive-sided flycatcher at Isaac Lake.

Jane Johnston of Markdale asked: "Is there a cut-off date when one should discontinue using hummingbird feeders?"

It's arbitrary. Cooler nights prompt ruby-throated hummingbirds to migrate.

Ernie Glozier recently had a hummingbird clearwing moth at his Beaver Valley property. "My last memory of this species is in the late 1930s." The moths hover like miniature hummingbirds.

The Owen Sound Field Naturalists monthly meetings resume Thursday at 7 p.m. at the library, and while meetings and outings cover a range of issues there's plenty to interest birders. For more information see www.osfn.ca or contact Fred Jazvac at 519-797-3332.