

# Kirtland Warbler Proves Attraction In Michigan

LANSING, Mich., May 7 (AP)—For a select group, Michigan's top attraction is neither the Mackinac Bridge nor Detroit's sprawling auto plants.

It is instead a rather non-descript little bird, not so large as a sparrow nor so colorful as a lark or any of dozens of other bird species you could name.



Harold Mayfield

But Kirtland's warbler is extremely rare. So rare that ornithologists believe it can be found only in Michigan during the summer months and only in the Bahama islands during the winter.

The total adult population is estimated at less than 1,000.

Yet, Kirtland's warbler is fairly easily located in Michigan. Its summer range covers only about eight counties in the north central lower peninsula.

For that reason, ornithologists by the score, amateur and professional, come to Michigan in hopes of adding the little wood warbler to their "life list" of birds they have seen first hand.

Dr. Donald W. Douglas, game specialist, says the department receives at least a dozen letters a year from bird lovers on the trail of Kirtland's warbler. Many others make inquiries at the department's Mio field office or its Houghton Lake research station before setting out.

The bird they seek is bluish gray above, streaked yellow below and carries two white bars on its wings. Its loud song and habit of twitching its tail also are distinguishing.

Invariably, it is found in large thickets of red pine or jack pine — hence its sometime identification as a jack pine warbler. Its nest is built at the base of the pines.

Right now, the warbler is winging its way north after wintering in the Caribbean.

Usually it arrives in Michigan in mid-May. A few years ago, the state

conservation commission set aside 7,000 acres in the Ogemaw, Thunder Bay River and Huron National Forests as a specially managed area calculated to improve the warbler's habitat.

With characteristic attention to detail, ornithologists report the Kirtland's warbler first was spotted May 13, 1851 near Cleveland and named for the father-in-law of the finder. It was a migrant.

Norman A. Wood, University of Michigan curator of birds, found the first nest near Oscoda in 1903.

Another U of M ornithologist, the late Dr. Josselyn Van Tyne, became the outstanding authority on the bird, conducting extensive field trips and surveys aimed at learning its number and the extent of its range.

With Van Tyne's death, Harold Mayfield of Toledo, an amateur ornithologist, took over the role of leading expert. Dr. Lawrence Walkinshaw, Battle Creek dentist and another authority, journeyed to the Bahamas this year to search for the warbler's winter habitat, in recent years virtually impossible to pinpoint.

The National Audubon Society, which in 1951 sponsored a survey of Kirtland's warbler summer range, is planning a similar project next year. Mayfield and others have voiced growing concern that its numbers may be falling.

If so, more steps probably would be taken to preserve the species. Michigan's rare bird, it is felt, should not be permitted to go the way of the passenger pigeon.