

Public Ceremonies Recognize Kirtland's Warbler in Michigan

by Harold Mayfield

For more than 100 years the Kirtland's Warbler has been a bird of exceptional interest to ornithologists. Through the research efforts of a few people, initiated by the late Josselyn Van Tyne, "America's rarest songbird" has become one of the best known songbirds scientifically. Yet to the wider public the bird has been unknown, and, even in the heart of its small nesting region in northern Lower Michigan, to the few people who have heard of the bird, it has been just a name. Here, where ornithologists have been studying the bird every summer for more than 30 years, it would have been difficult to find a local resident who has known the bird by sight or would have recognized its special habitat.

In the summer of 1963 for the first time the public at large was invited in to see and enjoy this attractive little bird. Some of us believe this was an important step toward awakening public sentiment and preparing the way for the energetic steps that might some day be needed if the survival of the Kirtland's Warbler should suddenly hang in the balance. At the moment it does not seem threatened, but with a population of only about 1000 individuals, its hold on existence is always precarious. If heroic efforts should be needed at some later time, a broader base of public interest might be crucial.

The introduction of the public to the Kirtland's Warbler in 1963 centered about two ceremonies at Mio, Michigan. The first was the dedication on June 1 of the Kirtland's Warbler Management Area in the Huron National Forest and of three preserves on Michigan State Forest lands in Ogemaw, Crawford, and Oscoda counties. The second was the unveiling of a monument to the Kirtland's Warbler during the Great Lakes Forestry Exposition on July 27. Both events were publicized widely in newspapers across the country.

The dedication of public lands to be managed for the benefit of the Kirtland's Warbler was praised as the first such effort on behalf of a songbird anywhere in the world. More than 300 people, nearly all of them having travelled to Mio for this occasion, gathered in the morning sunshine on a steep hillside overlooking Mio Pond. From a platform built over the water and draped with evergreen boughs, the principal speaker, Dr. Ira Gabrielson, President, U. S. Appeal of the World Wildlife Fund, and former head of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, pointed out that this accomplishment, unique of its kind, was one of a number of efforts needed to protect rare and vanishing species around the world. Spokesmen for the National Forests were Edward P. Cliff, Chief, U. S. Forest Service and L. A. Pommerening, Forest Supervisor of the Huron-Manistee National Forests; and for the Michigan State Forests, was Clarence Messner, immediate past Chairman of Michigan Conservation Commission. Harold Mayfield, Chairman of the Kirtland's Warbler Committee of the Michigan

