

Outdoors scene

Cry for help is sounded to save warbler

By JAMES A. O. CROWE
News Outdoors Editor

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE to help out in a campaign to halt the slide of the Kirtland's warbler toward extinction by contributing money to trap cowbirds and remove them from the warblers' nesting areas?



James A. O. Crowe

That's the question presented me in a telephone call the other day by Joe Bartell, president of the Detroit Audubon Society.

His group and the Michigan Audubon Society are trying to raise \$5,000 by next summer.

Bartell asked if I would bring the problem before the public. He came to the right guy, for I'm a sucker for the Kirtland's warbler.

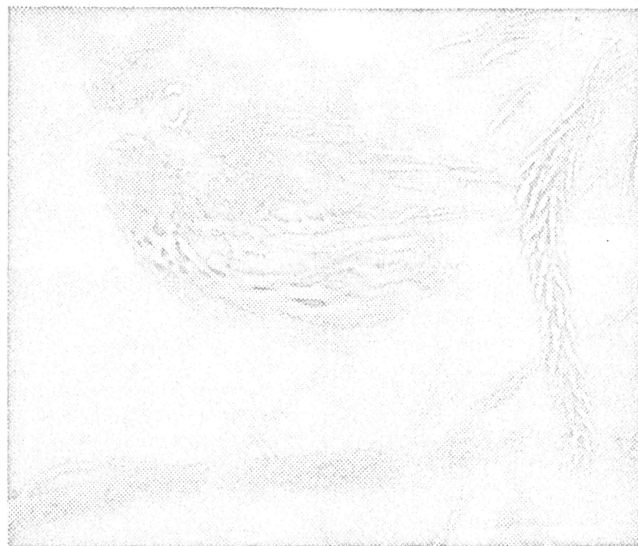
This pretty little, yellow-breasted bird nests only in 10

counties of the northern Lower Peninsula.

Every fall it migrates all the way to the Bahama Islands, but then in spring it faithfully makes the long flight back 1,500 miles to Alcona, Crawford, Iosco, Kalkaska, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle and Roscommon counties.

But even within those counties, it will only nest under very special circumstances.

The nest, built on the ground, must be in solid stands of immature jack pines, five to 15 feet tall, hence the bird's popular name—the jack pine warbler. In nature these stands of jack pine occur only after forest fires because it takes heat to pop open the jack pine cones. We have controlled forest fires all too well for the warblers, so that nesting areas were getting scarcer until we started deliberately setting forest fires in the warbler management area near Mio.



The disappearing Kirtland's Warbler

Warbler count takes drastic drop

IT TURNS OUT the warbler needs more help than that.

Last summer, a census of the birds was taken with the help of U.S. Forest Service and Michigan Department of Natural Resources personnel and a host of volunteers.

It was a sad duty to have to write a story after the census that only about 400 of the birds could be found. This was an alarming decline from the 1,000 counted 10 years earlier.

In recent weeks, the two Audubon societies have been mulling this over, and they set up a committee, headed by Harold Mayfield, an amateur ornithologist from Toledo who has become an authority on the Kirtland's warbler.

Also on the committee is Dr. Nicholas Cuthbert, of Central Michigan University, who has been trapping cowbirds in two of the warblers' nesting areas.

In both areas, the warblers have had much better nesting success than anywhere else.

That's because the cowbird is a parasite. It lays its eggs in the nests of other birds, leaving all the work of raising its young to other birds. The Kirtland's warbler has proven ideal for the cowbirds' purposes because the cowbird eggs hatch earlier than the warbler eggs, and the bigger cowbird fledgling pushes the warbler eggs out and gets all the food for itself.

More than volunteers needed

SO THE COMMITTEE has decided to expand Dr. Cuthbert's program to the 13 most used Kirtland's warbler nesting areas.

Using lumber and netwire, they plan to build 13 traps measuring 20 by 20 feet and six feet high. The traps, into which the cowbirds can fly but can't find their way out, are to be baited with sunflower seeds. The cowbirds trapped are to be removed from the areas. Other birds will be released.

It's going to take money for materials, sunflower seeds and to run trucks around to service the traps, even though dozens of volunteers will be called on to do a lot of the work.

So the societies are trying to raise \$5,000. If they get more than that, it will be used in research to find out more about the warblers.

If you want to get into the act, send your check to: Kirtland's Warbler Fund, Michigan Audubon Society, 7000 Westenedge Ave., Kalamazoo, Mich. 49001.

It's tax deductible.