

DOCTORS AFIELD

Dr. Jared Kirtland and His Warbler

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EVERY bird watcher in the United States worth his salt knows about Kirtland's warbler or "jack-pine warbler," even though few have seen it. It is a rare bird (less than 1000), which nests only in the northern part of the lower peninsula of Michigan and nowhere else. The nesting area, 160 km long and 96.5 km wide, is restricted to tracts densely covered with small jack-pine, *Pinus banksiana*, 1.5 to 5.5 meters high, with ground cover of blueberry, bearberry, and sweet fern.¹⁻⁴

Kirtland's warbler first became known to science when Spencer Fullerton Baird (1823-1887), "the best informed man of the vertebrate fauna of North America," assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and the author of a volume called *Birds* (1858), gave a description of a male taken on May 13, 1851. The new specimen was found near the farm of Dr. Jared Potter Kirtland, on the shore of Lake Erie, 8 km west of the center of Cleveland. Baird had previously attended the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science with his good friend Kirtland, and was then a guest at the doctor's farm. Baird was present when the collector, Charles Pease, brought the specimen to his father-in-law, Dr. Kirtland. Impressed by the unique species, he named the new warbler *Sylvicola kirtlandii* for his host, "a gentleman to whom, more than [to] anyone living, we are indebted for a knowledge of the natural history of the Mississippi Valley."

Indeed, Kirtland was deserving of recognition. Physician, teacher, horticulturist, naturalist, he was the author of the first list of birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians of Ohio. Dr. Kirtland should be as well known to physicians and historians as Kirtland's Warbler is to bird watchers.⁵⁻¹²

Jared Potter Kirtland (1793-1877) was born at Wallingford, Connecticut, the son of Turhand and Mary (Potter) Kirtland. His father, a stockholder and general agent of the Connecticut Land Company, moved to Western Reserve in 1803 leaving young Jared in Wallingford with his maternal grandfather, Dr. Jared Potter, who was reputed to be the best educated physician in the state. It was under his grandfather's influence that the young Kirtland became interested in natural history and horticulture. With the co-operation of cousins, Kirtland managed an extensive plantation of white mulberry trees designed for the rearing of silk worms. At the plantation, he discovered that the female silk moth, isolated from the male, could lay fertile eggs, an observation that presaged by half a century the experiments of Siebold and Streenstrup, which resulted in the demonstration of parthenogenesis in insects.

In 1811, having inherited his grandfather's medical library and enough money to finance his professional

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education, he began the study of medicine under preceptors. When the Medical Institution of Yale College opened in 1813, Jared P. Kirtland was the first student to matriculate. He was also a private student of Professor Eli Ives in botany and of the elder Silliman in geology and mineralogy. The next year he went to the Medical Department of Pennsylvania, where he studied under Benjamin Rush in medicine and Benjamin Smith Barton in botany. The influence that Barton had on Kirtland was evident in Kirtland's thesis: "Our Indigenous Materia Medica." He returned to Yale and received his M.D. in 1815. He practiced medicine in Connecticut until his wife died in 1823, when he moved to Portland, Ohio, where his father had settled before. He remarried, established his practice, and was elected to the Ohio legislature in 1828. As a legislator, he was able to reform the penitentiary by making industrial work available for the prisoners.

In 1837, Kirtland took the chairmanship of The Theory and Practice of Medicine at the Medical College of Ohio, Cincinnati, which he occupied until 1842. In 1843, he was one of the founders of the Cleveland Medical College, the Medical Department of Western Reserve College. Again, he was professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine until 1864, and, eventually, professor emeritus until his death. At this school, over 2000 medical students were instructed by him.

Actually, it is not his role as a medical man for which he is most remembered, but rather for his work in natural history. His name was known first to zoologists when he announced in 1834 that the fresh-water mussels consisted of males and females of different appearance instead of uniform hermaphroditic individuals, as had been taught up to that time. This report created a particular stir, because the males and females had been classified as separate species; Kirtland's discovery erased a considerable part of the established nomenclature of the family. Some scientists were slow to accept this revolutionary finding by an unknown writer in the backwoods of Ohio; the question remained a matter of controversy for years. It was not until that meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Cincinnati (1851) that Kirtland's position was fully vindicated. At the convention, Kirtland presented a convincing display of shells with males and females arranged according to age. Louis Agassiz, a member of the meeting, stated that he and the leading German scientists were of Kirtland's view.

Kirtland's "Report on the Zoology of Ohio" in the Second Annual Report on the Geological Survey of Ohio (1838) contained the first catalogue of mammals, reptiles, fish, shells, and crustacea of the state. In 1839 he became a member of the Boston Society of Natural History, and several of his papers on climatology, insects, birds and, notably, the fishes of Ohio, were published in its journal. He illustrated each of the 72 species with a drawing and commented on its form and habits.¹³ To make satisfactory pictures of the fish, he found it necessary — to his amusement — to take up drawing in middle years — more properly a study for

