

Mlanda Gene Duncann

"OUR VERY OWN WARBLER."

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We, who are fortunate enough to live in Michigan, have many unique things to boast about and be proud of--not the least of which is the smallest (5 1/2-inch) bird, the Kirtland's warbler. The source of our pride is that this rare warbler exists only in Michigan.

To be more exact it considers only a small area of our state suitable for family rearing. The favored spot is a few counties in the middle of the Lower Peninsula. Mio, Michigan, even has a statue dedicated to the bird.

Most bird books, especially the guides, devoted primarily to identification, give the necessary information about

resorts' because, as The Michigan Audubon Society explains, there are far more islands in the Bahamas than there are Kirtland's warblers. As for their nest building area this was not discovered until 1903. The honor of finding this first nest went to Norman A. Wood, who was then Curator of Birds at the University of Michigan's Museum of Zoology.

I like the fact that two trout fishermen, on the famous Ausable River, were responsible for the 'big find'. This river and trout and fisherman and Kirtland's warbler are all nicely bound together. Very appropriate. But getting back to the discovery--fortunately one of the men knew his birds. Upon hearing loud clear singing he realized it was something different. He shot the bird and took it to Mr. Wood in Ann Arbor, who immediately jumped the train and rushed north to begin what Les Line calls "an historic eight-day search via rowboat, horse and buggy, and foot". On July 2, 1903 he heard the warbler and

on the 8th he found the nest! This particular warbler is a ground-nester who sinks his home in the ground and carefully conceals it beneath the branches of small pines. The outer nest is made of weedstems, strips of bark and other pliable fibers. The egg-holding cup is lined with pine needles, fine grass and even hair. There are usually four eggs, pinkish white in color with a wreath of small brown freckles around the larger end. But there is far more to the nest location and the full complement of eggs.

These are fussy, finicky, particular birds who demand a highly rigid set of standards in their nesting area. They must have a fairly open stand of young jack-pines, six to twelve feet high are about perfect. The lower branches must droop to the ground--thus producing the tangle which affords proper hiding for the nest. The problem with this is that every few years the trees in an area which are 'just right' grow and the warblers must seek another stand. Since Smoky the Bear's

campaign against forest fire has been so effective and since the modern techniques and equipment for fighting these terrifying holocausts have proved so efficient there is a growing scarcity of Kirtland's nesting habitat. It seems that jack-pines are tough and it takes a hot, roaring fire to pop open the cones and allow the seeds to scatter. It almost became a case of no forest fires, no new seeding of jack-pines, no Kirtland's warblers. Then came Project Pop-Cone. A census in 1951 estimated that the total population of Kirtland's warblers stood at less than 1000. Ten years later the count was about the same. Not many birds. To put it another way, the average weight of a Kirtland's is approximately 1/2 ounce which means that at that time the world population was something like only 30 pounds. Shocking. Experts felt part of the problem was the ever diminishing stands of suitable jack-pines. In an altogether too rare instance people, organizations and governmental agencies pooled resources and know-how in an effort to insure adequate nesting habitat.

Certain sections of state forest lands and areas in two national forests were set aside and dedicated to the little bird.

1973, issue of The Michigan Audubon Newsletter, the trapping and removing of cowbirds from the nesting areas has been going along at a good clip. Last year 2400 in two months and in the first part of this season more than 3000 were captured. What is being done with the birds is something I am not going to look into--I have my own strong ideas about what should be done to cowbirds but they might offend many who have equally intense feelings against killing any living creature. I simply have no use for cowbirds.

Is this new program having the desired results? Well, so far the indications are that it is. Comparing the areas in which the trapping program in which carried out with areas in which there was none, in you definite increase in warblers and a decrease in cowbird parasitism. Dr. Harold Mayfield's census this year showed an almost eight fold increase in warbler population over last year. Because of distinctive songs, in males are counted. This head-counting, the researchers record songsters. It was also estimated that breeding adults nesting grounds nesting course, does not

Through my window . . .

the Kirtland's. It is among the largest members of the warbler family but that, of course, makes it no giant; it is also famous as a tail-wagger--many books use this characteristic as

Alphonse Dolinger

an almost fool-proof field identification. Appearance-

Because tire is such an intrinsic part of natural jack-

Young adults thinking of raising

"Inching our way..."

By ALEON DEVORE
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Not until later did I realize the golden opportunity I had let slip by on Sunday when friends dropped by with their two little girls, ages four and six. The girls were intrigued by the parade of insects that are a by-product of outdoor patios.

The first to enter the scene was a moth. Small fingers quickly caught it, and small fingers were as quickly covered with the dust from its wings as the captured moth struggled to be free. During the ensuing struggle, the delicate wings became tattered, but not enough to prevent the moth's flying away when the little girl put it on a rock in the patio wall.

Fascination had gleamed in the children's eyes as they watched the moth. The older girl bragged how she could tell the difference between a moth and a butterfly by the antennae; moths are feathery, and butterflies have little knobs on the ends. How did she know? Her teacher had told her.

Later the birds were seen in several localities which we now know as being along their migration route and in the Bahama Islands. Even today though it is difficult to pinpoint the exact site of their 'winter

minute she sighted it, it became prey for her foot.

The following day, I was at a neighbor's when her seven-year-old granddaughter dashed inside, wanting someone to brush an inch worm off her arm.

The grandmother called her grandchild to her, and with calming gentleness positioned her forefinger so the worm could crawl from the little one's arm to her finger. As the worm inched along the older woman's finger, the grandmother explained why it was called an inch worm.

This was a significant lesson for more than the granddaughter. Also visiting my neighbor was a six-year-old girl from Tehran, Iran. Her brown eyes sparkled with interest as she too watched. As I watched, my thoughts went back to the previous day, and I regretted not having explained to the little girl visiting me that the bugs whose lives she wiped out with her foot might in a short time emerge as the butterfly or moth she admired.

Education does overcome fear and clear away misunderstanding. It is seldom done in seven-league strides, but rather in shorter degrees, possibly in inches.

whose job it is to control forest fires, suddenly became 'fire-bugs'. Operation Pop-Cone is a very strictly controlled program of burning, on a five-year cycle, a square mile of mature jack-pines. It is felt that this will, along with timber harvesting and special planting, provide a constant supply of trees which these warblers need for successful family rearing.

For a while the Kirtland's picture was a rosy one. The protected habitat and a generous supply of young jack-pines were thought to be the necessary ingredients for an almost unprecedented and successful bird rescuing operation. Then the blow fell. The 1961 census of singing males indicated a 60 percent drop in population. Experts rushed in to find out why.

Their findings resulted in another crash program. A program to remove the brown-headed cowbird. These birds with their distressing habit of laying eggs in other birds' nests and letting the foster parents raise their young were showing a great fondness for the Kirtland's warblers nests. Since the young cowbirds are usually dominant, the baby warblers stood little chance. So in addition to its controlled firing the U. S. Forest Service, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the Michigan Audubon Society and several Audubon chapters started another campaign. They declared war on cowbirds.

According to statistics presented in the July-August,

of the successful matings, the hope is there and outlook good--the warbler should be making a comeback.

However, there is one more known hurdle for the Kirtland to clear if they are to succeed their fight against extinction. People. As more and more us become interested in birds and begin compiling life lists there is increasing pressure actually 'see' a Kirtland warbler. After all few rare birds are so easily pinpointed in specific areas. To maintain shield of the privacy these small characters need and deserve the U. S. Forest Service has instituted an 'enter the area on with a permit' policy. There are guided tours and the Michigan Audubon Society is urging that they be used. Also, only authorized photographers are permitted to click shutters.

So it is that many people organizations and agencies are indeed united in the tremendously complicated task of saving these 5 1/4-inch warblers--lets hope they succeed and that for many, many years all birdwatchers can join the Michigan branch of the Club in being proud of the Kirtland's--our very own warbler!



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