

Rare Warblers Sighted in State

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Madison, Wis. — There are barely more than 400 Kirtland's Warblers in the world. Two weeks ago, two were sighted in Wisconsin.

Kirtland's Warblers were among the first birds put on the national endangered species list. One wildlife specialist remarked that the entire population of these small birds could fit in a peck sack.

Their usual breeding area is a relatively small area of jackpines in the lower peninsula of Michigan.

Cowbird an Enemy

Besides the disturbance that birdwatchers create there, the Kirtland's main peril is the cowbird, which lays its eggs in warbler nests. Young cowbirds develop

faster than the fledgling warblers, hog all the food brought back by the Kirtland parents and toss their foster



The Kirtland's Warbler has been found in Wisconsin.

brothers and sisters from the nest.

Probably most excited by the Wisconsin sighting was Nancy Tilghman, who found the two birds.

"I guess I just couldn't be-

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Heve it," she said. "I just started babbling like an idiot to a friend that was with me. I didn't expect to find one because it was such a needle in a haystack type of thing."

Ms. Tilghman, 25, has worked part time in the Department of Natural Resources since she obtained a master's degree in wildlife ecology at the University of Wisconsin — Madison. She was on a team searching for the birds.

DNR Secretary Anthony Earl was excited too. He quickly pledged that the agency would do everything it could to protect and provide habitat for the birds.

Kirtland's Warblers are about the size of a wren, gray on top, yellow beneath, with long pointed wings and a notched tail. They winter in the Bahamas and were named after Jared Potter Kirtland, a 19th century American naturalist.

The Wisconsin sighting of the birds, both males, was in the west central part of the state within a hundred miles of Eau Claire. The DNR will not reveal the exact location until the nesting season is over.

With money from the Endangered Species Act, the DNR is attempting to select a better habitat for the warblers and transplant them to Wisconsin.

Ms. Tilghman and 11 groups of volunteers identified places where the war-

blers might nest and played a recording of the bird's song to elicit a response. She found the birds at the last site on her list.

John Keener, director of game management for the DNR, said, "They have long suspected there were birds in Wisconsin. There had been sightings years ago, but never confirmed."

Two of the men who know the most about Kirtland's Warblers came from Michigan last week and went out with Ms. Tilghman to net one of the birds and positively identify it. It had been banded in Crawford County, Michigan, in 1972.

John Byelich, leader of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Kirtland's Warbler team, and bird expert Larry Walkinshaw, a retired dentist, identified the warbler.

Walkinshaw said the males might have been in Wisconsin since 1973. He said warblers were a strongly territorial bird and that after their first year, the males moved to a new territory and stayed there the rest of their lives.

A 1971 survey in Michigan found that the number of Kirtland's Warblers had declined from 1,000 to about 400 in 10 years and that their nesting territory had been reduced from nine counties to three in the north of the lower peninsula. A 1975 survey counted only 179 nesting pairs.

