

Published by the Carolina Bird Club, Inc.

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General Field Notes

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THE CHAT is published quarterly by the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., with headquarters at the North Carolina State Museum, P.O. Box 27647, Raleigh, NC 27611. Second class postage paid at Raleigh, NC 27611. Subscription price \$12 per year.

PAGE CHARGES: Authors who have funds available for page charges are requested to remit same at the rate of \$40.00 per page. CBC Headquarters will provide statements required for your business records.

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ELOISE F. POTTER & FRANK J. RADOVSKY

At approximately 1630 h on 28 September 1991, we saw a Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) perched on a bare limb low in the edge of a tall, dense clump of native evergreen shrubs beside a fence at the banker pony pen observation platform on Ocracoke Island, Hyde County, North Carolina. The bird was also seen by Christi and Shannon Stanforth, two relatively inexperienced bird watchers from Pittsboro, N.C. The four of us had been watching birds overhead (especially a Merlin, *Falco columbarius*), in the feed lot, and in the shrubs about 10 m from the northeast end of the platform for approximately 30 minutes when we noticed at least 10 Palm Warblers (*Dendroica palmarum*) of the Western race that were hawking insects from perches low in the edge of the shrubs. The mowed grassy area immediately outside the thicket, toward the platform, appeared to be a still zone protected from the fairly strong easterly winds; in that area, various flying insects (including dragonflies, beetles, and small moths) were observed with and without the aid of binoculars. At that time, Potter saw a yellow-breasted, gray-backed warbler emerge from the thicket and perch briefly in bright sunlight about 0.5 m above ground.

At first glance the bird suggested the Yellow race of the Palm Warbler or an immature Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*), but both possibilities were quickly eliminated when the bird made a single sortie in pursuit of an insect and returned to its perch; no tail spots were visible. The sudden movement of the bird attracted the attention of the other three observers. The warbler remained on the same perch for approximately 3 minutes, moving its tail up and down intermittently, somewhat in the manner of the nearby Palm Warblers though less rapidly and with more of a drooping and cocking action. During that time all observers studied the bird through binoculars and noted the gray upper parts streaked with black; the gray rump; narrow whitish wing bars; the solid bright yellow throat and breast, the latter heavily streaked with black on the sides; and the white belly and under-tail coverts. An indistinct whitish eye ring was the only noticeable facial marking, and there was no well-defined black streak through the eye. The faint eye ring and an overall dinginess, probably caused by remnants of buffy feather edgings, suggested a hatching-year bird, though the possibility of an adult female cannot be eliminated. Most authorities believe that age classes are impossible to separate in the field in fall, and we do not claim to be able to do so. Radosky noted that the Kirtland's was definitely larger than the nearby Palm Warblers, being not only slightly longer but also generally more robust.

Although the four of us agreed on the significant field marks while the bird was present, no one called it by name. After it retired to the interior of the thicket, Potter (the only member of the group having previous experience with the species) turned to the double-page spread of fall-warbler illustrations in Robbins et al. (1983) and invited the other observers to find the bird; all three almost immediately selected the Kirtland's Warbler without realizing what it was until after the choice had been made. Bird guides by Peterson (1980) and

