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Regional Director WS
Twin Cities, Minnesota

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Assistant State Supervisor
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Status of Kirtland's Warbler
Population in Michigan

On October 30, 1971, I attended a meeting of concerned persons, Michigan Department of Natural Resources personnel, United States Forest Service representatives and representatives from several State Universities. Mr. Earl Baysinger, Chief of the Rare and Endangered Species Program, Washington, D. C., was present also representing the Bureau.

The meeting was initiated when the 1971 census of Kirtland's warbler showed the population to be down 60% from the last census taken in 1961. In 1961, 502 singing males were counted while only 201 were counted in 1971. The population has collapsed to the center of its range in North-central Michigan. Presently, 40% of the birds are on managed areas with another 50% on Federal or state lands. It was felt that the amount of prime warbler habitat was down, but that the existing habitat was not being completely used. It may be that we cannot determine what is prime habitat. Both the State Department of Natural Resources and the United States Forestry Service have management programs and areas for the Kirtland's warbler. It was felt by all at the meeting that providing good quality habitat is of prime importance in preventing the decline of the warbler.

Mr. Nicholas Cuthbert, Ferris State College, and Mr. Bruce Radabaugh presented data concerning the cowbird parasitism to Kirtland's warbler nests. These data indicate that 70 to 83% of the warbler nests are parasitized by cowbirds. Earlier data show that only 24% of the Kirtland's warbler nests were parasitized during the period 1931 to 1955. From 1957 to 1971 parasitism was up to 74%. A question was raised whether cowbird populations were on the increase or cowbirds were imprinting on the warbler nests. Mr. Cuthbert has been conducting a cowbird control program on two Kirtland's warbler management areas since 1965. Control has been accomplished by shooting and trapping during the breeding season, late April through July. Between 600 and 1,200 cowbirds were captured or shot each year since the project was initiated. Cowbird parasitism was reduced substantially as a result of the control, only 11% parasitism on one area (Cuthbert). Radabaugh reports an average of 21.3% of the Kirtland warbler nests parasitized when cowbirds were controlled.

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As a result of the meeting, an ad hoc Kirtland's Warbler Advisory Board was formed to set up a management program. Several management suggestions were presented for consideration. Of prime consideration was the possibility of controlling cowbirds on all nesting areas.


Baysinger indicated to the Advisory Board that there may be monies available for assistance with the management of the Kirtlan's warbler. He also indicated to me that this office would be the logical liasion between the Advisory Board and the Bureau.

I believe the Advisory Board will implement a cowbird control program on all of the Kirtland's warbler areas. If this does become a reality, it would seem logical for our Division to coordinate this program. The degree of our involvement will be directly dependent on the amount of monies the Rare and Endangered Species Section can provide. I do believe that Baysinger will be receptive to a program of this type.

It should be understood that the above proposals are speculative at the moment. Until the Advisory Board meets and establishes a management program, nothing can be done. I will be in contact with the Department of Natural Resources representative on the Advisory Board and will keep the Regional Office advised of any developments.

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William F. Shake