

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER SANCTUARY DEDICATION

by

Ira N. Gabrielson, President  
Wildlife Management Institute

It is a pleasure to be here at Mio and to participate in this historic occasion. It is a historic event for several reasons: first, because we are formally dedicating an area of public land to a very special and unique management endeavor, which in itself would be enough of an occasion for recognition. In addition, this is the first time, to my knowledge, that public agencies have ever dedicated land to be managed primarily for the preservation of one species of small songbird. Certainly it is the first in the United States, and, so far as I know, the first in the world for such a purpose.

This country has long had many refuges and sanctuaries, both public and private, devoted to the special care of colonies of birds or to maintain feeding grounds for spectacular bird concentrations. Many of the earliest federal refuges were small islands or rocks designated as refuges to protect and perpetuate known nesting colonies of Gulls, Terns, Murres, Puffins, Pelicans and similar water birds. The Audubon Society has secured and manages many areas largely for the protection of breeding colonies or feeding concentrations of such spectacular birds as Herons, Ibises, Egrets and Spoonbills. In the middle '30s the Biological Survey purchased two refuges primarily to preserve the vanishing Trumpeter Swan and Whooping Crane. One of the major attractions of Everglades National Park is the great concentrations of water birds along its roads and trails. While all of these and many other areas, including the entire federal refuge system, the national forests and the national parks, furnish habitat and living accommodations for a great variety of birds, none of them has been set aside specifically, nor managed intensively, for the purpose to which this is being dedicated today.

It is fitting on this occasion to recognize the long, painstaking, and basic studies of Kirtland's Warbler by Dr. Jocelyn Van Tyne and Harold Mayfield and those associated with them. Perhaps no other small bird in America has been so intensively studied. The detailed knowledge that they accumulated over the years forms the solid base of this management plan.

With a population of approximately 1,000 individuals nesting exclusively in a few counties in north-central Michigan and wintering in the Bahamas, the Kirtland's Warbler is subject to all of the migration hazards of other small birds, and it is something of a miracle that this small band of birds has persisted as long and successfully as it has. It is especially interesting in view of the fact that they nest only in small jackpine woodlands, and that once the trees attain any considerable size, they abandon that nesting ground for another. Perhaps at some previous date there were many more of these birds than there are at the present time, although no one knows. They depended on a fire ecology, and either Indian or lightning-caused fires kept areas open and developing into suitable habitat for this unique little bird. Man, with his fire protection and efforts to increase the production of useful forest products, has been the greatest destroyer of its useful habitat, since his efforts have been devoted to preventing fire and to encouraging the growth of timber, as far as possible, for future use. It is, therefore, of more than passing interest that about 12,000 acres of state and federally-owned forest lands are, from now on, to be managed primarily to preserve the peculiar type of habitat required by the Kirtland's Warbler, and that the forestry agencies are willing to sacrifice some timber values on these public lands in order to accomplish this purpose.

It is interesting to learn that they are approaching this effort with a variety of methods, all aimed at a common objective. It is fitting indeed that we come here today to recognize formally all of the many years of work of many people who have helped bring this program to its present climax. Some of this land has been managed for the Kirtland's Warbler for a number of years now and should be in

a useful condition for the birds before their presently available habitat nearby becomes untenable.

All over the world similar pressures are being exerted against rare birds and mammals, largely due to human activity. Many species of wild creatures are threatened with imminent extinction through man's activities, even though they may not be directed specifically against the wildlife. Within recent years, the construction of huge dams, the clearing of land, and the use of pesticides for insect control and of herbicides for vegetative control have destroyed essential habitat or have resulted in direct death to the local wildlife. For this reason, within the last two years, the World Wildlife Fund was formed with the purpose of finding out, first, where these endangered species are; secondly, what, if anything, can be done to save them; and third, to raise money to carry out a program once it has been developed. To do this, there is an International Board with world-wide contacts, whose principal reason for existence is to get accurate information on threatened species and to find out what can be done to save them. This Board is not a money-raising organization. Rather, its function is to develop sound projects to help these threatened animals and to channel the funds that may be available to the proper places. It does not propose to set up new organizations or new personnel to carry out these programs; it will work through existing conservation organizations wherever possible.

In a growing number of countries, there are national World Wildlife Fund organizations which are money-raising groups. Such active groups already exist in Great Britain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Germany and in our own country. Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands is the chairman of the International Board in Switzerland and also the chairman of the money-raising organization in his own country. Prince Phillip, The Duke of Edinburgh is the President of the British fund-raising organization, and I have the honor to be the head of the American one. While this work is just getting underway, it already has some notable accomplishments to its credit.

