

SUMMARY OF KIRTLAND'S WARBLER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES - 1972

The 1971 decennial census of the Kirtland's Warbler revealed the population had dropped to an all-time low of 201 singing males from 502 in 1961. This reduction caused considerable concern among those groups and persons interested in the Kirtland's warbler. On October 30, 1971, a meeting was called of those persons interested in the future of the Kirtland's warbler. The following agencies and organizations were represented:

Office of Endangered Species, US Fish and Wildlife Services  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
United States Forest Service  
The Nature Conservancy  
Michigan Natural Areas Council  
Michigan Audubon Society  
Detroit Audubon Society  
Pontiac Audubon Club  
Michigan Botanical Club  
Several Universities as well as interested individuals.

The consensus of opinion of those persons attending the meeting was that a cowbird control program should be initiated on the major breeding areas. Research has shown that cowbird reduction on the breeding areas reduces parasitism of Kirtland's warbler nests from 64 percent to an average of 24 percent. Other recommendations were to limit banding and handling of Kirtland's warblers. Limit access to nesting areas by the public. Census the population yearly to provide current information on the status of the population. Provide grant monies for an evaluation of the Bahama wintering grounds.

An ad hoc Kirtland's Warbler Advisory Board was formed consisting of the following groups and persons:

Harold Mayfield, Chairman  
Johy Byelich (Michigan Department of Natural Resources)  
Nicholas Cuthbert (Central Michigan University)  
G. W. Irvine (United States Forest Service)  
Bruce Radabaugh (Pontiac Audubon Club)  
Robert Storer (University of Michigan)  
William Thompson (Wayne State University and Michigan Audubon)  
Larry Walkinshaw  
William P. Shake (Bureau of Sport Fisheries & Wildlife, USDI).

On November 9, 1971, this committee met. It had been previously decided that this group would be the policy setting body for Kirtland's warbler management. The crux of this meeting was to establish an operational plan for the cowbird trapping. It was decided a total of 15 traps placed on the seven major nesting areas would be adequate. The Michigan Audubon Society raised monies for purchase of portions of the materials for the trap and provided funds for bait and salary for a temporary employee to tend six of the traps. The Department of Natural Resources agreed to provide the lumber needed for the traps and fabricate them. The Branch of Populations Management, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, would provide manpower to erect the traps and operate nine of them.

The Department of Natural Resources and the United States Forest Service both have active habitat management programs. The Forest Service has approximately 5,000 acres and the Department of Natural Resources has 2,400 acres dedicated for Kirtland's warbler management. Management practices center around prescribed cutting or burning in an effort to provide a continuous supply of suitable nesting habitat.

The cowbird trapping program commenced on May 2 and ran through July 15. Over 2,200 cowbirds were removed from the seven major nesting areas through trapping and shooting. The Michigan Audubon Society was also able to fund the hiring of an individual to use tape recorded cowbird songs and shoot those cowbirds attracted from the Kirtland's warbler nesting areas. Approximately 100 man days and \$7,217.41 were spent by this division during the trapping program. Figures are not available from the Forest Service concerning man days and costs of their involvement in the trapping program.

Kirtland's warbler nesting success was studied on two of the areas involved in the cowbird control program. On the Mack Lake area, 33.3% of the Kirtland's warbler nests were parasitized by cowbirds. This is somewhat higher than the 65-72 average of 24.2 percent parasitism.

6.02 percent of the 31 Kirtland's warbler nests on the military area were parasitized by cowbirds. This is substantially lower than the 66-71 average of 65.24 percent. From these data, it is apparent that the cowbird reduction program had a significant effect on the Kirtland's warbler nesting success.

It is also interesting to note that the average clutch size was substantially higher this year than in the past years. It may be that the over-all harassment by the cowbirds reduces average clutch size. During 1966-1971, Walkinshaw reported three Kirtland's warbler nests with 5 eggs, whereas in 1972 he found 19 nests with 5 eggs. Dr. Walkinshaw also reported that in 1970, 16 pair of Kirtland's warblers produced 27 young, an average of 1.25 young per pair; in 1972, 17 pair produced 75 young with an average of 4.41 young per pair.

This should provide a substantial increment into the population of Kirtland's warblers.

The 1972 census data revealed that the Kirtland's warbler population stabilized. Only 200 singing males were found. The 1973 census, hopefully, will show an increase resulting from increased nesting success in 1973.

The Kirtland's Warbler Advisory Board concluded that trapping should be continued and expanded in 1973. Other current recommendations from the committee were:

- a) Encourage magazines and publications to not use articles on Kirtland's warbler using pictures of young and nests;
- b) Discourage or limit public use of nesting areas;
- c) Pool all films and slides of Kirtland's warbler to be available for purchase.

On December 8, 1972, the Kirtland's Warbler Advisory Committee convened for its first meeting. The Advisory Committee was established to collect views on Kirtland's warbler management from a wide range of interests. These views would then be considered or implemented by the Working Committee (The Kirtland's Warbler Advisory Board). Of major importance at the meeting was the review of the Draft Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Plan prepared by the Bureau's Office of Endangered Species. Basically, the plan covered those needs and recommendations for Kirtland's warbler management expressed by the Kirtland's Warbler Advisory Board. Other items covered included:

expanding interpretive material;  
continuance of the cowbird control program; and  
discussion of a request to do research and banding of  
Kirtland's warblers on the nesting areas.

I feel that the Kirtland's Warbler Advisory Board has reached a point where they must set some priorities and policies and begin actively making recommendations on Kirtland's warbler management. If this is to be a reality, they first should draft a Memorandum of Understanding with all agencies, private and public, defining responsibilities. This agreement should state that the Kirtland's Warbler Advisory Board's recommendations should be thoroughly reviewed and/or sought prior to any management activity by Governmental Agencies. They should also coordinate research projects on the nesting area to avoid duplication and excess harassment of the birds.