

Memo

To: James H. Rogers and G.W. Irvine

From: Jim Bull

Subject: 1977 Kirtland's Warbler Tour Season--Evaluation and Suggestions

The 1977 tour season went quite well so most of my suggestions for next year are minor or admonishments to continue the same practices. A few of my suggestions are of a substantial nature and it is hoped that these will be given due consideration. The suggestions and their rationale are as follows:

1. Keep telling and interpreting the management story; the people lap it up and it makes seeing the bird that much more meaningful.
2. The Mio and Grayling tours ought to be closely coordinated and should follow the same guidelines for protecting the warbler (of course the tours themselves will differ, but the guidelines should not). It should be delineated clearly, perhaps in writing, what is and is not permitted. Unfortunately this year there were discrepancies between the tours which presented a particular problem when visitors participated in both tours. One of the big questions for next year is whether we ought to allow the naturalists to lure in birds with tape recordings. I don't believe we should but the two tours ought to follow the same policy. It might be a good idea for the Recovery Team to periodically have one of their members monitor the tours, not to harass the naturalists but to help them do the best possible job of protection. (I would want to know if I was unknowingly doing something detrimental to the warbler's protection) The tours were set up to protect the warbler--we ought to see that they stay that way!
3. The Communication System for informing the tour guide (naturalist) of current events related to the warbler could be better. I found out about the bird in Canada from Elaine Smith, and that this same bird didn't have a mate from Mia Hay--both times by chance. Articles on the Kirtland's that came into the Ranger station were often routed to everyone else in the office before me--a very bad situation. The Kirtland's Warbler tour guide should be kept up to date on new information related to the warbler. (Perhaps I should have called Bill Irvine once a week for an "update". Maybe I was remiss. It might not be bad to set that up explicitly!) Naturalist should be aware of KW files and library--I wasn't until 8/2/77.
4. Change the title from "Tour Guide" to "Naturalist!" Everyone in the office usually called me naturalist but the literature and job offer read, "tour guide." "Tour Guide" has a tourist trap ring to it, an image we should avoid. Several of my professors told me that "tour guide" was the worst possible position title for a resumé. In fact, they said, that title could be detrimental.
5. Limit the number to go on the tours to approximately 10 (perhaps flexible up to 15 at the naturalist's discretion, eg. where limiting a tour to exactly 10 would split up a family or group). Rationale:

A. Protection: If we mean business about protecting the bird we ought to limit tour size! I took 25 people onee on a tour and luckily we saw a warbler singing close to the road. I had been seeing him there quite reguarly. It may not necessarily be related, but I never saw or heard that bird again at that spot. An even more ridiculous time I had 44 people show up spontaneously for a tour, while numbers approaching 30 were not uncommon.

B. Viewing the Bird : Its alot harder to see the Kirtland's with more than 10 people. With groups limited to approximately 10 everybody on the tour will have a higher quality experience.

C. Keeping Track of People: Its hard enough to make sure nobody in a group of 10 strays, let alone a group of 44 or more! The logistics of leading all the cars, safely, and loading and unloading are a couple other problems.

D. Public Support: I believe you'd get enthusiastic public support especially if coupled with suggestion number 6. People are very disappointed when they wind up on a large tour because most realize the chances of seeing the bird well are much less. It is especially dis-concerting to a small group of birders when 5 min. before tour time 10-20 people pour in! We could easily accomodate the same number of people and more if spread out a little bit.

I did try limiting the tours somewhat. I put up a sign indicating we would try to limit tours to approx. ten. I put the sign up in mid-season so it was not practical to strictly enforce it. People that I asked to come back for another tour were very understanding--they wanted to see the bird well and not jeopardize its protection.!

I have talked to Dr. Walkinshaw and several tour members (soliciting opinions) and they concur. Most birders know enough and care enough to not want to jeopardize the bird's protection. They know small groups are best! For those who Don't or Won't understand the policy there is fertile ground for interpreting the fact that we mean business about protection. This policy should be far less controversial than the ORV policy, but no less necessary!

By taking out large groups or using tape recorders how many other people might be deprived of seeing a Kitland's Warbler because of that disturbance?

6. Reservation System: This is controversial but I believe necessary in order to facilitate limiting tours.

Rationale:

A. This could prevent the situation where people come from long distances and can't go on a tour due to the limitation--they could show up several times and miss out each time. (In the present system they could still go if there were 30 people on the tour but they still probably wouldn't see a Kitland's Warbler!)

B. Prevent Chaos: Without reservations people will line up at the doors before tours and cause lots of problems for the receptionist. Who got there first? Should they take a number? Will people camp at the office? What about the people who stopped in the day before, the hour before? Reservations are fairer to everyone.

C. Provide for Schedule Changing: A reservation system would enable visitors to know if a tour was full ahead of time so they could plan to come another time or arrange to go to Grayling.

D. Special Case: While the Forest Service generally shuns reservations for campgrounds, picnic grounds etc., this is a special case. People come from all over to see this bird and these tours are the only way to do so. When a campground is full a camper can move on to another one, but there is only one place in the National Forest where they can see a Kirtland's Warbler!

A reservation system could be set up in several ways, so the one with the least potential problems and work involved could be picked. People could call in, mail in reservations or make them in person. If this is too much hassle reservations could be taken in person only. This reservation system should be explained in the cover letter to Kirtland's Warbler inquiries.

E. Resistance would be Minimal: There may be some flack from those who didn't know about the reservation system (it should be well publicized) but I believe it would be minimal and easily handled. A real birder would sign up for another tour and stick around awhile longer or take it in stride. Putting up a sign on the door saying "Tour Full" would alleviate Forest Service personnel from telling every overflow person personally. If a client gets really irate the naturalist should handle it--a good chance to use some interpretive skills! The clerk and receptionist can usually pass the buck to the naturalist. I doubt it will happen much.

F. This would not eliminate Walk-ins. When tours are not full things would operate just as before. Much of the time we won't have to worry about reservations.

G. Larger Groups could be Accomodated: Here are two possible alternatives:

1. Groups could be scheduled for management tours on the premise of probably not seeing the warbler, if they number more than 10 or 15.

2. Could be handled by more than one guide. This was done two years ago in Grayling and worked well. The Grayling 1977 literature still lists this system. Perhaps the District Ranger or Biologist could be used on some of these occasions. A deal might be worked out with the Fish and Wildlife Service to use a Cowbird trapper occasionally or perhaps a volunteer.

H. There is Much Public Support for Reservations: Many people on my tours volunteered this idea to me. They felt reservations would be the only fair way of limiting tours.

Perhaps
people should
be there 15
min. before the
tour or have the
reservation!

