

HISTORY OF KIRTLAND'S WARBLER PRESERVE EFFORTS

1. 1951 Census

In my view the history of recovery efforts in behalf of the Kirtland's Warbler began with the census carried out in 1951.

In 1950 I suggested that a cooperative effort be made to find out exactly where the Kirtland's Warbler nested and how many there were. Friends, including Josselyn Van Tyne, the leading authority on the bird, doubted that it could be done, but I persisted.

I visited the offices of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in Lansing and the regional office of the U. S. Forest Service in Cadillac, and recorded the locations of all jack pine plantings and all forest fires in the Lower Peninsula from 1925 to 1945. I marked all these sections on their county maps.

I wrote people who had shown an interest in the warbler to ask for volunteers in examining each of these sections the following June, 1951. I recruited 32 participants, organized into 13 parties. Each party was assigned to search certain sections designated on my maps. Some reported no warblers, but the total count was 432 singing males, in 91 sections of 8 counties.

We believe this was the first detailed count of an entire songbird species in the world. For the first time we could judge the scope of the problem.

Harold Mayfield
August, 2000

2. Preserve proposal

In 1956 I sounded out respected friends on the idea of setting aside and managing a few small areas for the benefit of the Kirtland's Warblers within the state forest lands. I was assured that the Department of Natural Resources was interested only on game species. But my friend, F. M. Holden, a summer resident in Grayling and a friend of George Griffith, chairman of the Conservation Commission, urged me to write Mr. Griffith and do it promptly, as the Commission was to meet soon. I did so, on July 3, 1956, expecting little, assuming that an idea like this would have to simmer for a long time before bringing results. So I was astonished to get an instant response from Mr. Griffith, saying that the Commission had approved without a dissenting vote a motion to establish a preserve for the Kirtland's Warbler.

Frankly, at this time I had no such ambitious aim as to save the species, but merely to provide a few locations where people could see Michigan's prized species reliably. Up until this time bird watchers coming from all over America had a daunting task of combing the Northwoods in search of the species, often unsuccessfully. The locations move as the pines mature.

I was asked to consult with the forestry officials to draw up a plan. I proposed that three sites be designated as preserves, located in three different forest districts and each consisting of a square block of four sections. The suggestion was to manage each unit in portions, each in a different state of maturity. with jack pines harvested commercially at the end of each cycle.

In order to show public participation in this project, G. S. McIntyre, chief forester of the Michigan D.N.R. urged that the Michigan Audubon Society appoint an advisory committee to work with his agency. (I did not represent any group and was not a resident of Michigan.) Edward Brigham, president of the Michigan Audubon Society, appointed the following: Harold Mayfield, chairman, Josselyn Van Tyne, Andrew J. Berger, Verne Dockham, Fenn Holden, L. H. Walkinshaw, and Douglas Middleton.

Verne Dockham, conservation officer at Mio, was a long-time unofficial custodian of the Kirtland's Warbler, safeguarding it and recording its arrival on the nesting ground each spring. Other people playing important roles were Dr. Donald Douglas, technical adviser to the DNR at Lansing, and Lawrence Ryel, census specialist for the DNR, who later carried out the annual warbler censuses. Another was John Byelich, who picked up after Verne Dockham retired at Mio.

Much of this early history was recorded in a paper by Harold F. Mayfield. "Establishment of Preserves for the Kirtland's Warbler in State and National Forests of Michigan", *Wilson Warbler*, 75:216-220, 1963.

A public ceremony was held on July 27, 1963, at Mio Michigan to dedicate the new preserves. Attending were officials from Lansing and Washington and congratulatory messages from many national conservation organizations, including one from Prince Philip of Great Britain.

3. The third major step in support of the Kirtland preserve efforts was the establishment the federal Endangered Species Acts.

of 1966, 1969, and 1973. Federal action put enormous new force behind the preservation efforts, especially through the establishment of "Recovery Plans" for each endangered species. The Kirtland's program was already rolling, and its recovery plan was the first submitted from people outside the Fish and Wildlife Service. The first plan (on the California Condor) was prepared by professional staff members of the Fish and Wildlife Service

From this point the history is recorded in the Recovery Plans submitted to Washington, and the minutes of the Recovery Team.