

THE K.W. CUE



Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team Newsletter

THE FOLLOWING PRESS RELEASE REGARDING THE 2021 KW CENSUS WAS ISSUED ON OCT. 25, 2021, AND WAS ISSUED JOINTLY BY THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AND U.S. FOREST SERVICE.

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER CENSUS SHOWS ONCE-ENDANGERED SONGBIRD CONTINUES TO THRIVE



State and federal agencies and droves of volunteers have partnered to count Michigan's Kirtland's warbler population.

The agencies recently announced that surveys conducted in June show the small songbirds have continued to flourish since their October 2019 removal from the federal list of endangered species.

"The power of partnership continues to yield excellent results for the Kirtland's warbler after coming off the endangered species list," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Charlie Wooley. "Recovery of this beloved species required a strong, creative set of partners, and that spirit continues into the future with agencies, organizations and private entities working together locally, nationally and internationally. I'm confident this

strong partnership will secure the long-term future of this bird."

With the June survey results now tallied, the Kirtland's warbler global population is estimated at 2,245 pairs, which is more than double the 1,000-pair recovery goal for the species – which has been exceeded over each of the past 20 years. Researchers survey nesting areas, listening for singing males advertising and defending nesting territories. Each male found is presumed to have a mate, so the number of males also indicates the number of pairs.

Kirtland's warblers build nests on the ground, only in young, dense stands of jack pine in Michigan, Wisconsin and Ontario. This habitat was historically created by large wildfires. Today, wildfires are suppressed, and the nesting habitat is created by harvesting mature jack pine and planting jack pine seedling in the logged areas.

This year's Kirtland's warbler counts took place in jack pine nesting habitat situated across lands managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Nearly all the world's Kirtland's warbler population nest in Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula.

In 2017 and 2019, partial surveys were completed. This year's thorough census was the first full count of Kirtland's warbler since 2015, when 2,365 singing males were counted. This is believed to represent ALL the adult males of the entire global population of this highly localized bird species.

"Recovering a species as imperiled as the Kirtland's warbler wasn't easy," said Brian Bogaczyk, Regional Threatened and Endangered Species Biologist for the USDA Forest Service Eastern Region. "The US Forest Service is honored to play a part in the Kirtland's warbler comeback, an incredible success story that's a great example of what we can achieve with strong partnerships. We must continue to invest in creating habitat for this disturbance-dependent species to thrive, and the Forest Service is committed to doing our part in the future."

More specifically, 1,114 singing males were located on the Huron National Forest – representing a 9% increase over the number counted in 2019 – while 994 singing males were found on lands managed by the DNR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the northern Lower Peninsula.

In addition, two singing males were found in Lake County on the Manistee National Forest in jack pine not established for Kirtland's warbler breeding habitat. This was the first time the birds have been found on the Manistee National Forest since 1977.

"The number of singing males was above what we expected," said Phil Huber, Wildlife Program Manager for the Huron-Manistee National Forests in Cadillac, MI. "It's really gratifying to see this species doing so well, especially compared to the population lows we observed in the 1970s and early 1980s when 200 singing males was the average. The recovery of this species has been a decades long effort by many dedicated individuals."

In the Upper Peninsula, a record number of Kirtland's warblers were recorded by census participants. Previous counts recorded 37 singing males in 2015, 44 in 2017 and 40 in 2019. This year, 67 singing males were found across the Upper Peninsula, including 42 on the Hiawatha National Forest and 25 on state forest lands, with 22 of those situated within recovering jack pine forests burned in the 21,069-acre Duck Lake Fire of 2012.

"Expansion of Kirtland's warblers into new areas, and in greater numbers, is good news for the future of the species in Michigan," said DNR Director Dan Eichinger. "From the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance and American Bird Conservancy to our state and federal partners in the Great Lakes region, the effort and teamwork committed to the recovery of this species continues to pay great dividends."

In addition to the birds found in Michigan, Wisconsin surveyors detected 39 singing males, largely in central Wisconsin's Adams County. This is an all-time high for Wisconsin, which has been seeing ever-increasing numbers since first being detected in 2008. Also, surveyors in Ontario detected 22 singing males, also representing an all-time high there since surveys began. Kirtland's warbler surveys have been conducted in Michigan since 1951. The species was among the first animals included when the Endangered Species Act was passed in 1973. Populations sunk to a low of 167 pairs in 1974 and 1987 before mounting a gradual recovery.

Aiding greatly in that return were cooperative efforts between state and federal agencies, along with conservation groups, to conserve and expand suitable jack pine habitat and control brown-headed cowbirds. Cowbirds are nest parasites that lay their eggs in the nests of Kirtland's warblers and other bird species. The larger cowbird chicks out-compete warbler chicks for food, which causes them to die, while the warbler parents unknowingly raise the cowbird chicks.

By 2001, the number of Kirtland's warbler pairs in Michigan had surpassed 1,000, while the places the birds were located expanded to include the U.P., Ontario and Wisconsin. The birds migrate to and overwinter in The Bahamas.

The Kirtland's Warbler Breeding Range Conservation Plan was developed in 2015 and is now the guiding management strategy for the species. Additionally, funding and other commitments to habitat management and cowbird control are in place to ensure continued conservation actions in the absence of Endangered Species Act protections.

In addition, the Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team has replaced the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team established under the Endangered Species Act.

This press release can be continued online at: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIDNR/bulletins/2f8b361>

Get to Know a KW Conservation Team Member:



Mike Petrucha is retired from the Michigan DNR Wildlife Division, and has worked on many aspects of Kirtland's Warbler recovery, both professionally and as a volunteer for over 30 years. He has been involved in color-banding KWs, habitat creation, the KW Census, cowbird control, habitat protection, guiding tours, and spent 10 days helping with wintering ground research. He was an associate member of the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team, and served on the Research Committee. He also received a plaque of recognition for volunteerism from the KW Recovery Team. He currently serves on the KWCT Non-breeding and Human Dimensions subcommittees. He has been

on the Kirtland's Warbler Festival planning committee since 1996, and is currently the Chair of the festival. Mike maintains KW migration and wintering databases, a KW annotated bibliography, and is amassing an electronic and hard copy archive of KW material. He received his Bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management from Michigan State University in 1990.

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In the Summer/Fall 2021 issue of American Bird Conservancy's magazine "Bird Conservation," Katie O'Brien (USFWS), a KWCT Steering Committee member, was featured as a "Bird Hero." Katie recently accepted a new position with USFWS and will be transitioning off the Steering Committee. She will be missed greatly and her invaluable work on the Conservation Team will be forever appreciated! This cartoon is also available online at: https://issuu.com/abcbirds/docs/bird_conservation_summer.fall_2021_final.

IN THE NEWS:

A Tiny Bird's Poop Could Unlock Secrets of Climate Change Adaptation:

<https://news.wttw.com/2021/09/29/tiny-bird-s-poop-could-unlock-secrets-climate-change-adaptation>

A Day in the Life of a Conservation Biologist in Search of a Rare Songbird's Nest:

https://nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/news/day-life-conservation-biologist-search-rare-songbirds-nest?fbclid=IwAR2aG-qvql-loPCmMGc_43tHC8pLbJvJcYriDNHfyw3ty8PHLVdGfcnOWtw

Jack Pine Landscape to be Upgraded in Ogemaw:

https://www.upnorthvoice.com/outdoors/2021/11/jackpine-landscape-to-be-upgraded-in-ogemaw/?fbclid=IwAR0Ca_WS WZkXfZrms7ZdhknS upR5orxg_uFwNGPfcRUS2FSonSes8VEhyFk

BIRD HERO: Katie O'Brien

For 13 years, Katie O'Brien has worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in Marquette, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. A large part of her job is helping to build partnerships key to saving some of the continent's scarcest songbirds and other species. Here is some of Katie's story, in her own words.

2021 Virtual Kirtland's Warbler Festival

There was a total of 53 people registered for the festival, with the furthest reaching participant being from Japan. Virtual KW Festival presentations can be found on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/kirtlandwarblerfestival>, and YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNkRcVGQa2RsubgSslWGEWw/featured>. Check out the virtual tour on their YouTube channel and spend some time in the jack pines! The KW Festival now has a Twitter account. Give them a follow: @KWFestival1.



2021 Kirtland's Warbler Tours: Hartwick Pines State Park

Information and Photos Submitted by Craig Kasmer, MI DNR (KASMER@michigan.gov)

- 31 States Represented
- 39 Michigan Counties Represented
- 25 Tours (7a.m. Fri, 7a.m. & 11 a.m. Sat/Sun)
- Memorial Weekend through June 27th
- Participants: 493
- Only two days of rain
- Lots of new birders due to COVID
- Several children in attendance who asked their parents to take them, instead of parents dragging their kids along!

- Bird species seen on tours: Kirtland's Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Merlin, Bald Eagle, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Goldfinch, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Trumpeter Swan, Common Loon, Upland Sandpiper, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, Mourning Dove, Northern Flicker, Dark-eyed Junco, American Robin, Sandhill Crane, Eastern Bluebird, Common Raven, Eastern Towhee, Mallard, Brewer's Blackbird, Turkey Vulture, Baltimore Oriole, Great Crested Flycatcher, Veery, Eastern Kingbird



-Information on 2022 tours can be found online at: https://www.michiganaudubon.org/kirtlands-warbler-tours/?fbclid=IwAR3yAm2DzK_uWgW1aN145r8ahVNUR-RWpjRykbzKcF4Q87fJpGaCoB7tHT4



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Sept. 14-15, 2021 Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team Meeting a Success

- The fall biannual meeting of the KW Conservation Team was offered as a hybrid meeting, with both virtual and in-person attendance options. The meeting was held at the DNR Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center in Roscommon, Michigan. There were approximately 25 in-person attendees, and there was typically around 50 attendees at a time participating in the live meeting via Zoom over the two-day meeting. The recording and minutes can be obtained by emailing the KWCT Coordinator at kheidenreich@abcbirds.org.

- Dr. Carol Bocetti, the newly appointed Kirtland's Warbler Steering Committee Chair, emceed the meeting.

- Human Dimensions Subcommittee (Bill Rapai, Chair): The Committee has been focusing efforts on addressing the gap between Kirtland's Warblers and private landowners. They will be directing efforts to having conversations with the forest products industry in the coming months.



- Breeding Subcommittee (Keith Kintigh, Chair): DNR is in the process of updating their operational plan for State forest lands. The plan includes guidance on how DNR will manage habitat, minimize land use conflicts, cooperate with agencies to minimize cow bird nesting on Kirtland's Warbler habitat, and provides a copy of the MOU between the divisions. Traditional habitat management vs. experimental habitat management was clarified in the plan. 25% of DNR's habitat acres are committed to experimental management, to try to increase marketability, etc. More specificity was added related to developing methods to improve removal and regeneration of non

-merchantable stands. The DNR remains committed to the same habitat goals of 1,640 new acres per year.

- A habitat shortfall update was provided by the MDNR and the USFS. The MDNR lands, along with the Hiawatha National Forest, and the Huron-Manistee National Forest all have annual acreage goals, and for the past three or four years, all three agencies have not met their annual habitat goals. As a consequence of this, there will be a dip in habitat starting at about 2027. This spring the agencies had a meeting with USFWS and discussed the reasons for this dip and discovered a big reason for this is the hardships within the chip market, and a difficult time with sales. The DNR intends to include add more than 6,000 acres of habitat, which includes both scarification and plantings. The Forest Service is committed to 1,211 new acres per year going forward and has addressed timber sale procedures to avoid habitat shortfalls going forward.



- Non-Breeding Subcommittee (Dr. Dave Ewert, Chair): New subcommittee members were introduced (as various Bahamas National Trust staff members have left their positions for other pursuits). Mike Akresh of Antioch University in NH was added to the subcommittee, along with Falon Cartwright and Giselle Dean of Bahamas National Trust. Recent subcommittee projects include ongoing studies and data collection of KWs on goat farms; there has been initial research done on growing wild sage and black torch (KW staples) via a nursery to be planted on the landscape; the Kirtland's Warbler calendar and outreach continues through BNT and Giselle's efforts; a mapping project is being pursued of habitat on Eleuthera, and possibly Cat Island, San Salvador, Long Island habitat; there are also plans to update the KW Non-breeding work plan and Non-breeding conservation plan. Additionally, manuscripts are being developed that study the KW diet relative to rainfall, based on isotopes, and Fleshy-fruited plant phenology relative to rainfall, soil moisture, and other factors.

- Nathan Cooper and Eric Margenau gave a presentation on "Long-Distance Prospecting and Migratory Departure Decisions in Kirtland's Warblers." They covered hidden long-distance movements that they published a paper on last summer, discussed preliminary results from data collected in summer 2021 in a mixed pine plantation, spoke on departure decision making in song birds (including KWs), and lastly, covered modeling work done on maximum parasitism rate in KWs (Eric has taken over the publication on this, that has now been submitted).

- The Kirtland's Warbler Alliance provided an update on plans for 2022 renovations of the Kirtland's Warbler monument in Oscoda County, and they are currently accepting both donations and ideas for improvements to the historical monument. They also provided a sneak peek of a new, professionally compiled video depicting the story of KW conservation. Stay tuned for the final product!



- A silent auction was held over the two day meeting, and several meeting attendees brought in donation items of not only Kirtland's Warblers items, but also appealing food and drink items from their local areas. The highest bid went to a framed piece of Kirtland's Warbler art, donated by Dr. Carol Bocetti, and won by Keith Kintigh. Thank you to all who donated items and placed bids! Thanks to you, we raised nearly \$700 towards the Kirtland's Warbler Long Term Fund. If you are interested in making a tax-deductible donation to the Kirtland's Warbler Long Term Fund, you can easily do so online at <https://act.abcbirds.org/a/donate-kirtlands-long-term-fund?t=true&honoree=Dave+Ewert>.

- On the evening of September 14th, a celebration recognizing former recovery team and current conservation team members commitments and years of service took place. A video was shown, along with historical pictures of team members and field work. Dr. Dave Ewert of American Bird Conservancy, who recently celebrated his retirement, was honored and presented with a plaque on behalf of the Conservation Team.

- A bonfire and camaraderie followed the evening celebration, with several previous Conservation Team members visiting and reminiscing about the wonderful work that has been done over the years for Kirtland's Warblers.

