



The Newsletter of the Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team

Spring 2024 Issue

*This issue: Research Expedition in The Bahamas; Bahamian Racer;
KWCT Winter Meeting Recap; Meet Lakeisha Wallace, Preserve Manager*

International Research Team Maps Kirtland's Warbler Habitat in Central Bahamas

Understanding the distribution of Kirtland's Warbler habitat is essential to protecting their Bahamas wintering grounds. A research collaboration between Bahamas National Trust, the International Institute of Tropical Forestry, and Antioch University is in the process of producing a habitat map for the central Bahamas using remotely-sensed GIS data, and the map's quality needs to be validated by boots on the ground. A team of biologists representing all three organizations took to the field from January 27 to February 10 to assess multiple sites on Eleuthera and the Exumas.



From L to R: Mike Akresh, Shania Brown, Tara Levarity, Demonica Brown, Giselle Deane, Eileen Helmer, and Cole Scrivner. Photo courtesy of Mike Akresh.

The team collected data on vegetation composition and foliage height, surveyed for Kirtland's Warblers, and placed automated recording units in the field with the hope of detecting Kirtland's vocalizations. Several individuals were seen and heard on The Exumas. On one occasion, a portion of the team undertook an ambitious multi-hour cross-country trek looking for birds, eventually locating a Kirtland's close to their pick-up spot...right near a main road!



The research team explores prospective Kirtland's Warbler habitat on Eleuthera. Photo by Shania Brown.

"We were thrilled to find birds on Great Exuma, in habitat like that within Moriah Harbour Cay National Park, our only national park on mainland Exuma. Our long-term involvement in Kirtland's Warbler conservation can continue on a new island now that the bird's presence has been re-confirmed," said Giselle Dean, Senior Science Officer for Bahamas National Trust, "We are also very pleased to have had Tara Levarity and Shania Brown, two recent University of The Bahamas graduates, join us on the trip as research assistants. Training and involving young Bahamians has always been a very important and meaningful aspect of Kirtland's Warbler conservation in The Bahamas; continuing this effort is something we are grateful to see."

Visit us online! KWconservation.org

Join our mailing list by emailing KWconservation@gmail.com

Species Profile: Bahamian Racer (*Cubophis vudii*)

A common snake throughout The Bahamas, adult Bahamian Racers typically measure 30 in (76 cm) in length, although exceptionally large females can exceed 39 in (100 cm). Although it is mildly venomous, the racer is shy, so bites are rare and also have no lasting medical consequences. The mating season begins in late February and continues until at least April. Racers eat a variety of smaller animals, primarily *Anolis* lizards and small frogs. They have also adapted their diet to include non-native rodents (as seen below), making them an important part of ecosystems where Kirtland's Warbler overwinters.



Bahamian Racer with House Mouse (*Mus musculus*) prey. Photo by Steve Roels.

Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team Comes Together for Winter Meeting

Sixty people representing three countries and twenty-six organizations attended the Winter meeting of the KWCT to review the conservation achievements of 2023 and plan for 2024. Highlights included breeding habitat creation that exceeded the agencies' annual acreage target, strategizing to balance jack pine stand ages for management sustainability, deployment of new wildlife tracking stations in The Bahamas, the announcement of a Bahamas-focused fellowship with American Bird Conservancy, and an initiative to make communications towers near Kirtland's Warbler habitat safer for birds. The meeting concluded with a discussion of how to strengthen relationships with other bird-focused conservation collaboratives that are earlier in the recovery process through the [Road to Recovery](#) initiative.



Original photo by Jacob Spindelov.

IN THE NEWS:

[Michigan biomass plants to close](#)

State's changing energy mix creates questions for jack pine habitat management

<https://bit.ly/Mlbiodmass>

[Migrant lands on wrong archipelago](#)

The wayward warbler at least picked some islands that start with "B."

<https://bit.ly/BermudaKW>

[Kirtland's Warbler ringtone available](#)

Be the coolest kid on the block with a jaunty "chip-chip-che-way-o" every time someone dials your digits! Email KWconservation@gmail.com for the file.

Photo courtesy of Lakeisha Wallace



Get to Know a KWCT Member: Lakeisha Wallace, Preserve Manager

Lakeisha Wallace started with Bahamas National Trust (BNT) in 2021 as an Education Officer at the Leon Levy Native Plant Preserve (LLNPP) near Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera. As an Eleuthera native herself, Lakeisha enjoys working in her home community and conducting environmental outreach at the island's schools. She jumped at the opportunity to lead BNT's promotional efforts for the annual international Kirtland's Warbler Young Artists' Calendar Contest. In 2023, the contest received 165 entries from Bahamian students, including the overall winner. "The winners are quite excited to boast to their friends," Lakeisha told the *Observer*.

Lakeisha was promoted to LLNPP Preserve Manager last year but she plans to continue her role promoting the art contest. "I want to expand the contest's reach to schools on the northern part of Eleuthera and even other islands," she said. With an office in the middle of a botanical garden, it is easy to see where she gets her enthusiasm for Eleuthera's wild plants and animals. Lakeisha especially enjoys the many birds visiting the feeding stations right outside her door at LLNPP. "The Bahama Woodstars are my favorite; they are so pretty, but also so biggity!" [a Bahamian term meaning "bossy"], she said, "Watching the woodstars fight with the Bananaquits is hilarious!"

The *Kirtland's Warbler Observer* is published by American Bird Conservancy on behalf of the KWCT:

Michigan DNR, Wisconsin DNR, US Fish & Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, USDA Wildlife Services, Bahamas National Trust, American Bird Conservancy, Kirtland's Warbler Alliance, Huron Pines, PennWest University, Antioch University, Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, GEI Canada, Birks NHC