



The Official Newsletter of the Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team

Winter 2022 Issue

This issue: Conservation collaboration; Meet the new KWCT Coordinator; Winter meeting date announced; Interview with scientist, Dr. Fred Van Dyke

What's in a Name?

The Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team (KWCT) newsletter has a new name and logo! Veterans of Kirtland's Warbler field studies regularly remark on how inquisitive the bird can be. While land managers, ornithologists, and bird lovers have closely observed the species for decades, the Kirtland's Warbler is no doubt a keen observer of humans as well.

The new logo has the "Jack Pine Warbler" looking back at us, waiting to see what we do next. Will we continue the conservation measures that brought it back from the brink of extinction?

The *Kirtland's Warbler Observer* highlights the ongoing work of the KWCT, a consortium of government agencies, non-profit organizations, and universities, to ensure the future of the charismatic Kirtland's Warbler.



Photo by Greg Homel, Natural Elements Productions

Jack Pine Ecosystem Species Profile: Secretive Locust

Found only in Michigan, the Secretive Locust (*Appalachia arcana*) lives in bogs in jack pine country. Also known as the Michigan Bog Grasshopper, this species has no ability to fly, making it potentially sensitive to fragmentation and other habitat disruption.

The Secretive Locust is strongly associated with Sweet-Fern and Lowbush Blueberry, two understory shrubs that also typify Kirtland's Warbler habitat.



Photo by Greg J Schmidt

Being Neighborly: Agencies Collaborate for Conservation

A fragmented patchwork of land ownership in northern Michigan complicates Kirtland's Warbler conservation, which requires landscape-scale forest management. However, the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) program allows federal land managers to team up with their state counterparts to get on-the-ground conservation done more effectively and efficiently.

An agreement between the Huron-Manistee National Forest (HMNF) and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MiDNR) allows timber sale revenue from federal land to be transferred to the MiDNR, which uses the funds to implement habitat restoration on federal land, benefitting Kirtland's Warbler and other wildlife. Brooke Owens, HMNF Special Authorities Coordinator, told the *Observer*, "GNA increases our scale and pace of restoration. Often the DNR can secure access on non-Forest Service lands when the Forest Service can't, allowing us to complete projects we couldn't do otherwise."

One GNA project accomplished in 2022 was planting 476 acres of jack pine in Iosco County. The regenerating jack pine will support breeding Kirtland's Warblers, as well as deer, snowshoe hare, and grouse. With the HMNF and MiDNR working together, a "patchwork" landscape can also be viewed as a quilt.

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Join our mailing list by emailing KWconservation@gmail.com

***SAVE THE DATE:* February 14, 2023**

Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team Semiannual Meeting

Location: Online video conference | To register, contact Steve Roels (sroels@abcbirds.org)



Photo by Natalie Cannata

The Van Dyke research team stops for essential field supplies. See article below.

The Kirtland's Warbler Needs YOU!

We nearly lost the Kirtland's Warbler forever. But with help from public agencies and non-profit partners, the warbler fought back from the brink of extinction.

While the Kirtland's Warbler is no longer on the endangered species list, we cannot stop managing habitat and protecting it from threats. The Conservation Team is building a fund that will support the Kirtland's Warbler in perpetuity. Your gift can help ensure this rare and beautiful bird is around for generations to come.

To give, visit: act.abcbirds.org/a/donate-kirtlands

IN THE NEWS:

*Shore-to-Shore
Birding Trail
Debuts in U.P.*

400-mile route highlights Michigan's exceptional birds, including Kirtland's Warbler.

[https://
bit.ly/3CbcjSl](https://bit.ly/3CbcjSl)

*Global Antenna
Network Provides
Insights into
Migration*

Kirtland's Warbler migratory movements can now be tracked in real time.

[https://
bit.ly/3VjE2ci](https://bit.ly/3VjE2ci)

*New Bird Migration
Explorer Released*

Animated migration route for Kirtland's Warbler shows connections between Michigan and The Bahamas.

[https://
bit.ly/3Chnusr](https://bit.ly/3Chnusr)

Science Spotlight: Research Team Tests Alternative Survey Method

Dr. Fred Van Dyke has closely followed the fate of the Kirtland's Warbler for decades, tracking population estimates as the species recovered from near extinction. The traditional Kirtland's Warbler census estimates numbers using single visits to each site. However, Van Dyke's experience surveying other wildlife species showed him the importance of calculating detection probability, which can only be estimated after multiple site visits. [In newly published research](#), Van Dyke and colleagues report detection probabilities for individual Kirtland's Warblers following a three-year study featuring repeated site visits each season. The team found that even well-trained observers undercount birds during a single visit to a site, resulting in underestimates of singing males, a key metric for species management.

The team also evaluated reproductive performance in red pine, following reports of Kirtland's Warblers, often regarded as jack pine specialists, breeding in red pine. "They use it [red pine], they breed successfully in it, and early indications are that they do at least as well in it as in jack pine," said Van Dyke.

Van Dyke hopes the research will encourage incorporation of detection probabilities into the recurring census, as well as continued experimentation with red pine in habitat management. Perhaps this pernickety bird is less fussy about its habitat than we thought. But it sure is hard to count!

Get to Know a KWCT Member: Dr. Steve Roels, KWCT Coordinator

The KWCT has a new coordinator! Dr. Steve Roels collaborates with federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups to further the recovery of the Kirtland's Warbler and implement the long-term stewardship plan for the species. A staff member of American Bird Conservancy, Steve facilitates information exchanges and conservation projects across the Kirtland's Warbler conservation network, including working with Bahamian colleagues on the wintering grounds. Steve told the *Observer*, "I'm excited to join this team of dedicated conservationists. As a native Michigander, I'm thrilled with the opportunity to help Michigan's iconic songbird!"

Steve holds a PhD in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from Michigan State University, where he studied bird community recovery in Panamanian tropical forest restorations (pictured at right). He previously worked for a municipal open space program in Colorado and a state-wide land trust in Kansas. The *Observer* asked him about his first Kirtland's Warbler experience: "I saw my first one just a month after psychologically 'becoming a birder,' when I was an undergrad in a field ornithology course. Little did I realize at the time where I would end up professionally almost 20 years later!" Steve lives in Lowell, MI with his wife, a dog, a horse, a donkey, and a flock of chickens.



Photo by Amber Datta