



# The Newsletter of the Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team

Winter 2023 Issue

*This issue: Is a Warbler Rename Coming?; Land Trust Restores Habitat; KWCT Anticipates Future Fund Use; Meet Mike Akresh, University Professor*

## Changing Times, Changing Names?

The American Ornithological Society (AOS) has announced a plan to change all eponymous (named after people) English names for birds in the Western Hemisphere. The effort will, eventually, rename the bird currently known as Kirtland's Warbler. The AOS is the most widely recognized authority for bird taxonomy in the Americas, so this decision will affect public media, academic articles, and government documents.

Public engagement with diverse stakeholders is planned to be a key component of selecting a new English name for each species. Names may reference the physical appearance or natural history of the bird.

Read the statement from the American Ornithological Society here:

<https://americanornithology.org/about/english-bird-names-project/>



A female Kirtland's Warbler navigates an urban migration stopover site in downtown Detroit. Photo by Meredith Meyer.

## Ontario Land Trust Dedicates Land to Restoration

Kirtland's Warblers have been tracked wandering in the farmlands east of Toronto, Ontario on more than one occasion. But what if they aren't just wandering? What if the species has retained a genetic memory of suitable habitat in this region and birds are still looking for it over a century after it was lost?

Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust (ORMLT) aims to discover what these birds know by launching an ambitious landscape restoration project for Kirtland's Warblers and associated species. After a careful search for suitable properties, ORMLT found just the right place to get started, purchasing a 196-acre farm in Northumberland County. The farm checked all the boxes: a large parcel with sandy soils, connectivity to the publicly-owned Ganaraska Forest, and opportunity for future acquisitions nearby.



OKWWG scouting trip to the restoration site. From left: Isobel Ralston, Ben Walters, Pete Burke, Aileen Barclay, Rob Tonus, Mary Gartshore, and Jan Ralston. Photo courtesy of A. Barclay.

A long history of agricultural use on the site means habitat will have to be built from scratch. Thankfully, ORMLT is collaborating with the many other partner organizations of the Ontario Kirtland's Warbler Working Group (OKWWG), which all bring expertise in land management and ecological restoration. In recognition of the long-term commitment to the restoration process, ORMLT hosted a traditional ribbon tying ceremony on the site, led by Anishinaabe elders. "It was a way of introducing ourselves to the land," Aileen Barclay, ORMLT Program Director, told the *Observer*.

The land and the OKWWG will, indeed, be getting to know each other well in the coming years. In November, the group sowed the first 28 acres with a native seed mix to establish a diverse ground flora and begin afforestation. Red pine planting will follow in 2024 or 2025 and this first parcel will act as a seed farm for restoration activity on the rest of the property. After all this careful planning and hard work, the wait will be on to see if any wanderers are called home.

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Join our mailing list by emailing [KWconservation@gmail.com](mailto:KWconservation@gmail.com)

## Save the Date: Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team Winter Meeting

February 13, contact [KWconservation@gmail.com](mailto:KWconservation@gmail.com) for more information

### Species Profile: Big Sand Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela formosa*)

A jewel of dry, sandy soils, the Big Sand Tiger Beetle thrives in Kirtland's Warbler habitat. This species is an active predator, hunting on open roads and patches of bare soil. While listed in some states and provinces as a species of "conservation need", there are healthy populations in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ontario.



Big Sand Tiger Beetle, Simcoe County, Ontario.  
Photo by Steve Roels.

### IN THE NEWS:

*Motus tower fills MI network gap*

New installation pays instant dividends, including a Kirtland's Warbler record

<https://bit.ly/MotusKW>

*Kirtland's makes pitstop in Detroit*

Migrant lingers in urban environment for two weeks, delighting birders

<https://bit.ly/KWinRockCity>

*Michigan man purchases vintage Slurpee cup*

Biologist amused by rare collectible found in local antique shop

<https://bit.ly/KWat7-11>

A newly planted Jack Pine seedling.  
Photo by Bill Rapai.



### KWCT Adopts Kirtland's Warbler Funds Policy

In anticipation of the fast-approaching ability to start funding projects, the Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team Steering Committee unanimously agreed to adopt a new governance policy for the income-bearing funds dedicated to supporting Kirtland's Warbler conservation in perpetuity.

The governance policy outlines where and how fund distributions can be deployed and the process through which the KWCT will prioritize projects for funding. Dr. Dave Ewert, who led the subcommittee that drafted the new policy, said, "The governance policy identifies both the opportunities and constraints from funding sources and thus sets our expectations to support future Kirtland's Warbler work."

The funds will support coordination of the KWCT, habitat restoration and management innovation, scientific research, conservation capacity building across the full annual cycle, cowbird control, and public outreach.

To give, visit: [act.abcbirds.org/a/donate-kirtlands](http://act.abcbirds.org/a/donate-kirtlands)

### Get to Know a KWCT Member: Mike Akresh, University Professor

Dr. Mike Akresh's first Kirtland's Warbler sighting was a non-target mist net capture during his graduate study of Prairie Warblers in The Bahamas. The accidental capture in 2012 turned out to be the first record of Kirtland's Warbler on the island of San Salvador in almost 50 years! Once on his radar, Mike started finding more birds on the island, including birds banded in Michigan. Meeting Joe Wunderle, Dave Ewert, and Dave Currie of the Kirtland's Warbler Research and Training Program on San Salvador the following year encouraged Mike to collect additional data on the habitat characteristics where he found birds.

Now a professor at Antioch University, Mike has continued his research on Caribbean birds, including overwintering Kirtland's Warblers. A key component of Mike's research program is building the skills of Bahamian students and conservation professionals. He is currently collaborating with Bahamas National Trust staff to build a Kirtland's Warbler habitat suitability map for the central Bahamas. "A better understanding of Kirtland's winter needs will guide conservation, management, and protection of climate-resilient lands," Mike explained. Mike co-chairs the Non-breeding Range Subcommittee of the KWCT with Dr. Ancilleno Davis of the University of The Bahamas.



Photo by Janet Clarke Storr

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