

A RECENT RECORD OF THE KIRTLAND'S WARBLER IN FLORIDA

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On 17 October 1999, we found and photographed a Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*; Fig. 1) at Smyrna Dunes Park, Volusia County, Florida. It was more than 24 hours after Hurricane *Irene* had crossed the peninsula from west to east and headed out to sea. We arrived at Canaveral National Seashore, Volusia County around dawn and scanned the ocean from the entrance gate (the Seashore was closed due to the hurricane). Shortly after sunrise, we began to see a few Merlins (*Falco columbarius*) and Peregrine Falcons (*F. peregrinus*) flying in. Within minutes, we saw large flocks of wood-warblers coming in off the ocean, and by 08:15, several thousand birds had made land-fall. Most birds fed briefly and then flew off to the north. We estimated the composition



Figure 1. First-year female Kirtland's Warbler at Smyrna Dunes Park, Volusia County, Florida, 17 October 1999. This constitutes the second verifiable record for Florida. Photograph by Kurt Radamaker.

to be 60% Palm Warblers (*Dendroica palmarum*), 15% Blackpoll Warblers (*D. striata*), 15% Cape May Warblers (*D. tigrina*), 5% Black-throated Blue Warblers (*D. caerulescens*), and 5% American Redstarts (*Setophaga ruticilla*). We also noted several Yellow-billed Cuckoos (*Coccyzus americanus*) and Gray Catbirds (*Dumetella carolinensis*) present.

We watched this flight for about an hour, then headed north to Smyrna Dunes Park. Upon our arrival at 09:45, a steady stream of wood-warblers was passing over and through the low scrub foliage at the park. At about 10:05, we discovered a Kirtland's Warbler feeding low in vegetation on the dunes. Aware of the rarity of this species in Florida, we photographed it from 5-8 m away with a Canon AE1 camera and Tamron 400 mm lens.

The Kirtland's Warbler was a robust *Dendroica*. The upperparts were gray, with fine black streaking on the forecrown, and bold streaking on the gray mantle with brown wing coverts. A narrow white eye-ring was complete except for a narrow gap behind the eye. The eyes were black. The bill was slightly decurved, with a pale pinkish base to the lower mandible. The underparts were yellow except for the white vent and a distinctive white area along the side of the breast and flanks bordering the wings (Fig 1). The throat and upper breast were lightly marked with black streaking, which became bolder on the flanks and extended to the vent. The legs and feet were blackish. Based on the pale base to the mandible, the Kirtland's Warbler appeared to have been a first-fall female (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The bird spent most of its time foraging on the ground and in low vegetation, and frequently was out of view. It called occasionally, so we knew it still was present. The call was a clear, hollow *chip*. The warbler wagged its tail constantly, similar to that of a Palm Warbler. The Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee (FOSRC) accepted our observation (FOSRC 00-403; Bowman 2000).

Kirtland's Warbler is an endangered species, breeding only in early successional jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*) forests, primarily in Crawford, Oscoda and Ogemaw counties within the Au Sable River Drainage, Michigan (Dunn and Garrett 1997). Its population, which was severely impacted by brood parasitism from Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), is recovering with cowbird control, and numbered 902 singing males in spring and summer 1999 (Tessen 1999). Kirtland's Warblers are believed to winter exclusively in the Bahamas, although uncorroborated reports exist from adjacent islands and coastal Mexico (Mayfield 1992). Most wintering observations are from the larger islands of the northern Bahamas, with most specimens from New Providence and Eleuthera, south to Caicos (Dunn and Garrett 1997). Even where they occur, Kirtland's Warblers are rarely encountered in winter, and extensive searches over the past several decades have produced few sightings (Mayfield 1996). In migration, Kirtland's Warblers are seldom observed, and most observations are near the breeding grounds in spring, when singing males are conspicuous (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Our observation is the 20th report of a Kirtland's Warbler in Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Pranty 1998). Occurrences by months are: April (6), May (1), August (1), September (2), October (7), and November (3), although several of these reports have been questioned (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The FOSRC has accepted three of five recent observations—our record and two reports: Hypoluxo Island, Palm Beach County on 29 April 1982 (FOSRC 82-025; Powell 1986) and Orchid Island, Indian River County on 22 April 1993 (FOSRC 93-273; Anderson 1995). Three specimens of Kirtland's Warblers purportedly have been taken in Florida, but only one of these—a male collected by Charles Cory at Jupiter Inlet, Palm Beach County on 27 April 1896 (FMNH 20515) is known extant (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). No other twentieth century report appears to have been of a bird that was photographed, so our observation constitutes only the second verifiable record in Florida. Copies of our photographs of the Kirtland's Warbler at Smyrna Dunes Park have been deposited at Tall Timbers Research Station (TTRS P742) and the Florida Ornithological Society archives at the University of Florida (_____).

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