

Crane Creek Kirtland's Warbler

Ed Pierce

Not since May 21, 1980 had a Kirtland's warbler been seen in Ohio. It was also at the Crane Creek State Park bird trail but probably never has this species been seen so clearly by so many people at one time as this last Spring's Bird Trail phenom.

Many people have traveled to the Mio, Michigan area to see this rare species numbering only 500 birds. As most know its habitat restrictions a certain height and spaced Jack Pine, limit its population. It apparently migrates from its recently discovered West Indie's wintering grounds in a single flight as few birds are reported along the path. Slightly off course birds encounter Lake Erie and must rest before crossing this forty mile obstacle. At least that's what happened to the perfect plumaged male May 9, 1987 that rested at the Crane Creek S.P. Bird Trail from about 10:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. that day. It conveniently stayed at the very opening to the western entrance to the trail, making it almost the first bird seen as each birder began his day's adventures. However, most birders disbelieved Doris Glauser's identification at first. Many not even reversing their path through the trail to check out word of the sighting until informed by other birders that the bird was indeed present. But fortunately the bird was very sluggish and unaffected by human presence and all birders present that day (some guessed two hundred people) had views within nine feet of the bird as it obediently sat in grape vines.

Rarity is of course relative to the observer. One university class of novice birders enjoying their first trip to the Bird Trail and perhaps their fifth field excursion overall started their days birding at the opposite end of the trail disregarding the report of the "rare" bird at the other end of the trail. But then, palm, black throated, green and blue, redstart etc. were all "rare". Emblematic of the day the Kirtland warbler was still present two hours later when they finished the trail and saw it. Some of the student's wondered, how people could get so visibly excited over one bird.

The bird (see photo in this issue) was at times heard to emit a soft warble.

Several Kirtland's have missed in the past according to American Birds: 1979, Chicago, 5/10; 1980, Crane Creek S.P. Bird Trail, female, banded, 5/21; 1981, Chesterton, Indiana, female, 5/17, third state record; 1983, Michigan City, Indiana, male, 5/22-23; 1984, S. Ontario, female singing on territory, 6/22-7/9, (found as a part of a systematic search of ten likely sites in Ontario and W. Quebec: the third summer bird found in nine summers).

As for other Ohio sightings:

Williams, Birds of Cleveland, 1950 lists 14 sightings ending in 1946 including the original find on the grounds of Dr. Kirtland in 1851. Newman, Birds of Cleveland Region, 1969 reports one sighting 5/19/57. Campbell; Birds of Toledo area, 1968 lists 7 records ending 1966. Troutman, Birds of Buckeye Lake notes that 6 records exist in Central Ohio by members of the Wheaton Club between 1922-1933. Tom Bartlett has a sight and photo record for Seneca County for 1977.