

# 100 Years Ago in *The Auk*



*The Auk* 115(4):1096–1097, 1998

## Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandi*)

BY FRANK M. CHAPMAN (*Auk* 15, No. 4, 1898)

"The activity of field ornithologists during the past fifteen years has deprived most North American birds of the distinction of being termed rare. Species which a score of years since were known from only two or three specimens are now represented in collections by large series, continued research showing that their supposed rarity was due to our ignorance of their true range. Particularly is this true of the Warblers, birds whose habits make them especially difficult to observe; but one by one enthusiastic collectors have discovered their habitat, nests and eggs, until of all the North American members of this family, with the exception of several Mexican species just reaching our border, we can now write 'rare; nest and eggs unknown,' only of Kirtland's Warbler.

"Forty-six years have passed since Kirtland's Warbler was made known to science. During this time nineteen specimens have been recorded from the United States and fifteen from the Bahamas. In addition to these specimens there exist thirty-three Bahaman specimens collected by C. J. Maynard making, as far as I can ascertain, a total of sixty-seven examples. A study of the data attached to these birds fixes with considerable certainty the winter distribution of this species and throws some light on its routes of migration and probable breeding range.

"Thus during the winter Kirtland's Warbler apparently ranges throughout the Bahamas, having been found from Caicos to Abaco, though it has not as yet been recorded from Inagua. Its northward migration begins in April, South Carolina being reached toward the end of the month, either by direct flight from the Bahamas, or, what is more probable, by advancing northward along the Southeast Atlantic Coast (St. Helena, April 29, Worthington).

"This is the most northern, spring cis-Alleghanian record, the migratory route of the species now leading it northwestward into the Mississippi Valley.

"It is reported from Missouri, May 8 (St. Louis, Widmann); from Illinois, May 7 (Glen Ellyn, Gault); from Indiana, May 4 and 7 (Wabash, Wallace); from Ohio, May 12 and 13 (Cleveland, Pease and Chubb; four other Ohio specimens without exact date); from Minnesota, May 13 (Minneapolis, Guilford); and from Michigan, May 11 (Battle Creek, Green), May 15, 16 (Ann Arbor, Covert; also one specimen about May 1, Knapp), and May 21 (Mackinac, Marshall).

This last is not only the latest spring record but also the most northern record we have of the species. The specimen on which it is based was killed by striking the lighthouse situated at the Straits of Mackinac and, as I have before suggested, was doubtless *en route* to a more northern breeding ground in the Hudson Bay region.

"In the fall we have only two records for Kirtland's Warbler (Ft. Myer, Va., Sept. 25, Palmer, and Chester, So. Car., Oct. 11, Loomis), suggesting that the species returns to its winter quarters over much the same route it selects for its northwestward journey in spring.

"Few of the ornithologists who have been so fortunate as to secure specimens of this rare Warbler have given us any account of its habits. Mr. Cory, however, states of a specimen he secured on Andros Island: 'Its actions much resembled those of *D. coronata*, and it seemed to prefer thick brush.' Mr. Widmann compares it to *D. palmarum* and says that it has the wagging motion of the tail, so characteristic of that species, that it appears to be terrestrial, and in the carriage of its body and manner of evading discovery by skillfully alighting behind a protection object, it resembles *Geothlypis agilis*. Messrs. Smith and Palmer also mention the bird's habit of tail-wagging. Mr. W. O. Wallace states that the specimen secured at Wabash, Ind., May 4, was an active flycatcher, while the song of a second specimen consisted of 'a loud, ringing note, repeated three times in quick succession. . . . It is loud and rather musical.'

"In addition to these records of collectors of the species we have several others by ornithologists who have observed but not secured it. Mr. Walter Hoxie states that on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, May 3, when without his gun, he saw three Kirtland's Warblers, and gives his observations on their song and actions, as follows: 'They were quite familiar, allowing me to approach cautiously within less than a rod. . . . The notes are of two distinct characters. The first, a song, was uttered with the head held forward and body quite erect. It bore a striking resemblance to the song of the Yellow-throated Warbler. The second was a loud chipping, uttered while moving about among the bushes, and was kept up for a space of one or two minutes at a time. Resting a few seconds the bird would begin again, creeping about the branches and 'swapping ends' with a quick jerking

movement all the time. Arriving near the top of the bush or the end of the branch he would settle himself and sing two or three times before fluttering to the next bush. All these specimens were in low bushes and seemed to prefer them to trees. . . . neither did I see any of them alight on the ground.'

"Mr. L. S. Keyser, who observed a specimen of Kirtland's Warbler 'one day in early spring' (locality

not stated, but presumably in Ohio), describes its song as 'a blithe, liquid melody,' the tones being 'full, clear and bubbling.' (Bird-Dom, p. 63).

"These brief notes constitute our sole knowledge of the habits of this species, whose nest and eggs, owing to its rarity and the remoteness of its probable breeding range, will doubtless long remain unknown."

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### **Change in Recent Ornithological Literature**

Starting with this issue of *The Auk*, the *Recent Ornithological Literature (ROL)* will no longer be published as a printed supplement. This follows a decision by the AOU Council at the April meeting in St. Louis. Instead, the *ROL* will be posted on BIRDNET, the web site of the Ornithological Council. The address is: <<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/>

[ROL/index.html](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/ROL/index.html)>. Information about using the file is given on the *ROL* home page. Issue number 76 is in the works and should be available by the time this notice appears. It is hoped that subsequent issues will be posted three or four times annually and that each issue will remain on the site for at least one year.