

Touring Kirtland's Warbler Country

The Oakland Owlet's Families and Friends ventured north to the Huron Manistee National Forest near Roscommon for a chance to see the rarest songbird in North America, the Kirtland's Warbler. We were not disappointed. A small group met U.S. Forest Service biologist Dana Meder on a sandy road east of Roscommon. Within minutes of arriving, Michigan's most famous warbler greeted us with his warbly song. After walking a short distance, we watched a pair of warblers fly back and forth from their nest. Guided by the expert knowledge of Ms. Meder, the group watched from the road careful not to enter the habitat. This was one of three spots we visited.



The Kirtland's Warbler is successfully breeding in young Jack Pine forests managed by the U.S. Forest Service in the Huron Manistee Forest. The U.S. Forest Service and other land managers are responsible for the comeback of the warbler. In 1986 Kirtland's warblers were seriously declining. The breeding birds census found only two hundred breeding pairs. Fast forward to 2019, the warblers were removed from the endangered species list. At their last breeding bird census 2300 breeding pairs were recorded exceeding the expectation target for their recovery and a testament to the power of teamwork. Nevertheless, Kirtland's warblers remain a conservation reliant species and land managers must continue to provide appropriate breeding habitat.

Other birds observed during the tour included Black-capped Chickadee, Eastern Bluebird, Killdeer and Nashville Warbler. Car caravanning to other locations in the national forest, we saw northern summer residents such as Brewer's Blackbird, Common Raven, and Common Nighthawk. At one location the group was mesmerized by watching four Common Nighthawks feed overhead. The group discovered a Killdeer nest along the road and the Killdeer entertained everyone with the predator distracting broken wing display. We stopped for the show, and everyone got a close look at the Killdeer nest.



eBird checklists for this field trip on June 18th noted **twenty-two species**:

Blue Jay
Black-capped Chickadee
Eastern Bluebird
American Goldfinch
Nashville Warbler
Kirtland's Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Wild Turkey
Killdeer
Northern Flicker
Field Sparrow

Red-winged Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Nighthawk
Sandhill Crane
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Northern Flicker
Common Raven
Tree Swallow
Eastern Towhee
Ovenbird
Rose-breasted Grosbeak



Thank you to Dana Meder, U.S. Forest Service Biologist, and member of the Kirtland's Warbler Committee.

Photo Credits - Kathleen Dougherty & OAS Gallery.

