



## **The Kirtland's Warbler: The Story of a Bird's Fight Against Extinction and the People who Saved it**

Author: Donner, Deahn M.

Source: The Auk, 130(2) : 393-394

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2013.130.2.393>

---

BioOne Complete ([complete.BioOne.org](https://complete.BioOne.org)) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at [www.bioone.org/terms-of-use](http://www.bioone.org/terms-of-use).

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

---

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

remote sensing and the lack of supervised habitat classifications, which can make extrapolations problematic. A third issue is how birds are counted on rapid plots. Differences in survey methods are thought to be why the average detection ratios differed between the United States (Alaska; 0.81) and Canada (1.27; p. 215). Obtaining better detection ratios for species in different regions would be useful.

Given the issues identified above, I concur with Andres et al. (2013) that population estimates provided within the monograph should not be adopted unless coefficients of variation are  $<0.30$ . Secondary sources of information from wintering and migration areas should also be used to affirm estimates. Where great discrepancies with historical estimates are present, I hope this will cause others to conduct more in-depth surveys for these species. I anticipate that population estimates will only get more precise and accurate as more in-depth natural history information is collected on species and more detailed habitat information becomes available. Fortunately, Arctic PRISM has flexibility to incorporate new survey approaches should advancements occur in the coming years.

Although Arctic shorebirds appear prominently in the title of the book, information is presented on the distribution, habitat use, and abundance of other bird taxa (chapters 4 and 6–9). This additional information was likely included because the authors promote expanding Arctic PRISM to include waterfowl, waterbirds, and passerines, calling it the “most important remaining innovation” (chapter 15). Expanding Arctic PRISM to include all birds may make it more appealing to funders, but this will come at a cost in terms of logistical effort and funds, and in terms of the changes in the likelihood of shorebirds being detected both on intensive and rapid surveys. Because the current Arctic PRISM sampling design is based on stratification of potential shorebird habitats, population estimates of other bird taxa may also be biased. In my experience, “all bird” surveys count everything but count everything less well.

Overall, I found the book very well written and easy to follow and think it provides a good overview of the Arctic PRISM program during the past decade. I recommend it as essential reading for people interested in shorebird monitoring and population assessment, and as an important acquisition for college and university libraries.—RICHARD B. LANCTOT, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Bird Management, 1011 E. Tudor Road, MS 201, Anchorage, Alaska 99503, USA. E-mail: richard\_lanctot@fws.gov*

#### LITERATURE CITED

- ANDRES, B. A., P. A. SMITH, R. I. G. MORRISON, C. L. GRATTO-TREVOR, S. C. BROWN, AND C. A. FRIIS. 2013. Population estimates of North American shorebirds, 2012. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 119:178–194.
- ARCTIC PRISM PEER REVIEW COMMITTEE. 2010. A peer review of the Arctic PRISM program. U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management, Arlington, Virginia. Available online at [www.shorebirdplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/ArcticPrismPeerReview.pdf](http://www.shorebirdplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/ArcticPrismPeerReview.pdf).
- CAVM TEAM. 2003. Circumpolar Arctic vegetation map (1:7,500,000 scale). Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) map no. 1. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska.

- MORRISON, R. I. G., B. J. McCAFFERY, R. E. GILL, JR., S. K. SKAGEN, S. L. JONES, G. W. PAGE, C. L. GRATTO-TREVOR, AND B. ANDRES. 2006. Population estimates of North American shorebirds, 2006. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 111:67–85.

*The Auk* 130(2):393–394, 2013  
 © The American Ornithologists' Union, 2013.  
 Printed in USA.

**The Kirtland's Warbler: The Story of a Bird's Fight against Extinction and the People Who Saved It.**—William Rapai. 2012. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor. x + 204 pp. ISBN 9780472118038. Hardcover, \$24.95.—The population recovery of Kirtland's Warbler (*Setophaga kirtlandii*) is one of the most fascinating success stories of an endangered species in the past 60 years. As the author states, the story transcends the bird and its environment. By including the human dimension of recovery efforts, this book keeps the reader involved throughout what ends up being a catalogue of management and research accomplishments. Of particular interest are the personal descriptions of many key individuals that bring the story to life. Without these personal accounts, the book would be easy to put down, but as written, the story that spans several decades is captivating. This well-written book is divided into three parts: the past, the present, and the future.

In the first part, the author successfully uses historical events and people to describe the bird's natural history and the Jack Pine (*Pinus banksiana*) ecosystem in which it nests. It is in this section that vivid descriptions are given of the species' discovery, song, and what it takes to find this gray-and-yellow warbler in young, thick stands of Jack Pines in northern Lower Michigan. Key events that defined recovery efforts across decades are described, using historical accounts to provide the point of view of key individuals such as Harold Mayfield and Lawrence Walkinshaw. One chapter is devoted to the problem of nest predation by Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*; hereafter “cowbirds”) and how cowbird control contributed to stabilizing the population. This chapter introduces many of the key cowbird trappers and their unique perspective on efforts to save this species. Another significant event that is described well is the devastating Mack Lake Fire that took a life and the property of many residents. The negative attitudes that resulted from the fire helped draw attention to the importance of education and outreach programs in recovery efforts, which at the time had not been used. The people and actions of the outreach program were pivotal in getting the local community involved as part of the recovery effort. This integration resulted in a Kirtland's Warbler Festival to attract tourism into the area and fostered understanding on the importance of early-successional stages of the Jack Pine ecosystem to multiple species, not just Kirtland's Warbler.

In the second part, the focus shifts to describing present-day research. This research is targeting winter habitat in the Bahamas. Research efforts are linking the winter and breeding habitat to better understand the current pressures on the species. The descriptions of

challenges that face researchers in a foreign country that has unusual land-ownership laws are particularly interesting, as are the personal stories about finding this bird in remote areas. It is in this section that the annual census is introduced, and personal stories of volunteers who have contributed to this effort for many decades are given. By using the story of a young conservationist from the Bahamas, the author is able to touch on the larger picture of today's conservation efforts between countries and agencies with different agendas, and he shows how one person can make a difference in conservation efforts in the Bahamas. Perhaps most satisfying in this section is the chapter on conflict resolution. Again, the examples presented on key conflicts help make the story even more extraordinary.

The last part, on the future, is the shortest and least developed. The future of Kirtland's Warbler is definitely uncertain, given efforts to delist and the unknowns associated with a changing climate, but the final stages of the story seem incomplete. However, the fairly new idea of establishing trust funds for conservation-reliant species such as Kirtland's Warbler is presented well, and maybe that is the end of the story so far.

By the end of the book, the reader truly begins to understand why so many people come from all over the world to view this warbler. A common thread among individual accounts presented here is the excitement and thrill of finding the elusive Kirtland's Warbler and, once found, the surprise that these birds are quite "friendly." Although the book is not meant to be a historical documentation of events and individuals, I feel that the failure to mention the contributions of John R. Probst is a major oversight. Dr. Probst, a retired Forest Service researcher, played an integral role on the recovery team for almost 30 years. His many publications on breeding habitat requirements at stand and landscape scales, population limiting factors, and pairing success were important scientific contributions. If the goal was to display the passion that individuals who worked with this bird showed, then Dr. Probst's devotion over decades could have easily been incorporated into the past and present sections of the book.

Though written for the lay person, there are enough historical accounts and information that biologists, ornithologists, and conservationists will find the book useful. This book will make good reading in a graduate seminar on endangered species, policy, and human dimensions. In addition, many readers of this journal and birdwatchers who travel great distances to see this rare bird will find a place on their shelves for this book because the story about the influence of a small bird on communities from two countries and on the careers of many individuals is truly fascinating.—DEAHN M. DONNER, *Institute for Applied Ecosystem Studies, Northern Research Station, U.S. Forest Service, 5985 Highway K, Rhinelander, Wisconsin 54529, USA. E-mail: [ddonnerwright@fs.fed.us](mailto:ddonnerwright@fs.fed.us)*

---

*The Auk* 130(2):394–395, 2013

© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2013.

Printed in USA.

**The Albatross and the Fish: Linked Lives in the Open Seas.**—R. W. Doughty and V. Carmichael. 2011. University of Texas Press, Austin. 302 pp. ISBN 9780292726826. Hardcover,

\$29.95.—This is a book about the complex relationships among policies that address the exploitation and conservation of key parts of the marine environment. It examines efforts to conserve albatrosses, one of the most threatened bird families on the planet, and one of the main causes of their situation—fisheries for tuna and other species. There has been a tendency over much of recent human existence to regard the planet's environment and the life that it supports as being here solely to support humans. In this view, harvesting should serve the short-term needs of the harvesters. The authors describe in detail the dawning realization of the threats to albatrosses, the underlying drivers on those threats, and the efforts to reduce them.

The first six chapters describe the essentials of the birds' biology and a history of human interaction with albatrosses, including efforts in the 20th century to conserve albatrosses at their colonies. The text has some black-and-white photographs, and there are a few pages of the same photographs in color. The seventh and eighth chapters cover the growth of the legal environment that affects human interactions with albatrosses. Chapter 9 surveys the world fishing industry briefly, leading into a series of chapters concerning fisheries and fisheries management.

The book describes the change from net fishing to longline fishing that occurred in the 1980s, driven partly by a ban on high-seas drift nets, but also by the usefulness of lines in harvesting new target species. This change brought with it higher rates of bycatch of albatrosses (and some other species) that took a decade or so to be noticed in terms of albatross population trajectories. The techniques to reduce this bycatch are remarkably simple in concept (described in one chapter), but the challenge is to ensure their implementation, particularly when an individual fisher may only see a very occasional bycatch and the techniques may add, very marginally, to the complexity of the fishing operation. Most regulatory structures for fishing are dominated by the interests of the harvesters. This applies both nationally and internationally, and when those structures are inadequate to ensure that overharvesting does not occur on the target fish stocks, what hope is there for a bycatch species?

The authors provide a history of the work that has gone into attempting to change this situation, including that of the individual scientists who noticed the problems originally and the work of non-governmental and some governmental organizations. The book finishes with the establishment of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) and the first years as that agreement began to be implemented. The authors are ultimately hopeful that the combined efforts of all of the players, including those engaged in ACAP work, will be successful, but they note that this is by no means a foregone conclusion.

This is one of the best books I have read on the complexities of human interactions that underpin nature conservation. There are 50 pages of appendices and supporting material. Although well researched, the book is perhaps a little biased in its sources toward the English-speaking conservation part of the global community. It would have been interesting to understand and explore more of the Latin American or east Asian attitudes to the problems besetting the albatrosses and the related issue of harvesting the sea's resources. There are some places where I understood issues differently but, as with all history, there is much that is personal interpretation. I recommend the book to anyone who wishes to understand the history of albatross conservation—and