

March 8, 1980

Dr. Storrs L. Olson
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Washington, D. C. 20560

Dear Storrs,

Your letter reached me on the eve of my departure for several weeks, and my reply will be regrettably hasty.

Your discussion of winter limitations on the Kirtland's Warbler is fascinating and so beautifully lucid it may wreck your chances of being regarded profound.

Since others of us are frankly baffled about the non-rebound of the species in spite of an excellent production of fledglings (with cowbird control), any light that can be thrown on the survival problems in the Bahamas will be helpful. No one has done more field work in those islands and thought more about the habitat there than Mary Clench in Pittsburgh, and you might want to get her views. I too have been in the islands many times, but I have never found the Kirtland's Warbler there, and Mary has (once!). Steve Fretwell, whose main focus on survival problems has always **been** directed at the wintering situation, also has speculated at length on this species, especially interspecific competition.

When we visit the Bahama Islands, it seems to us there is vastly more suitable habitat than the bird can possibly use. A couple of years ago I flew at low altitude from Grand Bahama to New Providence and was struck by the fact that the Berry Islands, mere dots on the map, seemed to have enough scrub to harbor all of the Kirtland's Warblers.

Here are two facts that are probably significant although they do not answer our questions: The main loss of birds occurs in their first year of life between fledging and return to the breeding grounds the following June; the survival of adults is excellent, at least 65% return from the previous year. And, second, the birds positively identified in recent years in winter have all been solitary.

I see little significance in the nonbreeding, male strays in Wisconsin, Ontario, and Quebec. All birds wander out of their ranges occasionally, and these, of course, could be regarded as pioneers if successful. Although the jack pine is very widespread, every experienced person who has looked at the sites outside the Michigan nesting range has remarked, "The habitat does not look quite right." We suspect the ground cover is not suitable usually.

One of the two enclosed reprints mentions my continuing suspicion that the extreme reduction recently in the breeding range presents a serious navigation problem to birds making their first trip northward, causing some to miss and settle in marginally suitable pinelands where the female will not nest. The other reprint gives my 1972 views on the winter habitat.

I hope this helps a little. Go to it.

Sincerely,