



The Newsletter of the Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team

Spring 2025 Issue

This issue: Andros Expedition; Kirtland's Culture: DNR Patches; White Sage; KWCT Winter Meeting Recap; Meet Anastacia Rigby, Education Officer.

Bahamas National Trust Science Team Makes Expedition to South Andros

Although Andros is dominated by Caribbean pine forest, there are pockets of the hardwood coppice habitat preferred by wintering Kirtland's Warblers. In December, an expedition team led by Bahamas National Trust Science Officer, Giselle Deane, explored the south end of the island complex to assess habitat suitability and survey for Kirtland's. Windy conditions and impenetrable vegetation in places challenged the team, but they returned to Nassau with valuable insights.

"While the weather wasn't the most cooperative, the South Andros field excursion was successful," said Giselle. "Although we only found one Kirtland's Warbler (and suspected another), the habitat looked great." The team reported a remarkable abundance of snowberry (*Chiococca alba*), an important food source for wintering Kirtland's Warblers.

The location of the confirmed Kirtland's was also significant. "I'm particularly pleased that the bird was seen within the boundaries of the Andros West Side National Park, which supports populations of other threatened species such as Smalltooth Sawfish, West Indian Flamingo, and Andros Rock Iguana," explained Giselle.



From left to right: Giselle Dean, Tara Levarity, and Shania Brown. Photo by Giselle Deane.



Kirtland's Culture: Michigan's Living Resources Patches

Fifty years ago, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources initiated a fundraising campaign for the state's Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. For \$5 (later \$10), wildlife enthusiasts could purchase annually issued patches featuring a Michigan species. On the brink of extinction in 1975, Kirtland's Warbler was obvious choice for the first patch design. Subsequent years highlighted a diverse variety of species: Gray Wolf, Calypso Orchid, Marbled Salamander, Lake Sturgeon, and even Passenger Pigeon, the last being a sobering reminder of what could have happened to Kirtland's Warbler. The MI DNR discontinued the patch program in 2017, but the general concept of issuing items bearing wildlife imagery to generate income for the Trust Fund continues to bear fruit. Since 2022, wildlife lovers have been able to purchase license plates featuring Kirtland's Warbler. *Left: The inaugural Living Resources patch.*

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Volunteers Needed for 2025 Kirtland's Warbler Breeding Census

Contact KWconservationteam@gmail.com for more information

IN THE NEWS:

KW wins state bird debate at brewpub

KW enthusiasts turned out for a lighthearted lobby to change Michigan's state bird and overcame the incumbent American Robin and a challenge from the Black-capped Chickadee.

<https://bit.ly/KWwinsCawcus>

Species Profile: White Sage (*Lantana involutcrata*)

Kirtland's Warblers set up shop for the winter where White Sage grows in abundance. Also known as Button Sage or Wild Sage, the shrub produces nutritious berries that remain available in the late winter as other food sources become more scarce. As a pioneer species, White Sage rapidly colonizes areas recently disturbed by hurricanes, construction equipment, or grazing animals. Not just valuable to warblers, humans use the plant in teas and to cure skin conditions.



White Sage, Eleuthera, The Bahamas. Photo by Steve Roels.

By the Numbers:

Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team Winter Meeting

76 people representing three countries and 35 organizations attended the Winter meeting of the KWCT to review the achievements of 2024 and look forward to 2025 conservation action. Highlights included a presentation on Kirtland's Warbler genetics, new outreach projects in The Bahamas, and monitoring plans for 2025, including the every-four-years census and demographic work in experimental habitat. The meeting concluded with the formal adoption of a revised KWCT charter.



Get to Know a KWCT Member: Anastacia Rigby, Bahamas National Trust Education Officer

"I always loved teaching; as kids, I would force my brother to play 'school' with me," Anastacia Rigby, Education Officer with Bahamas National Trust (BNT), told the *Observer*. Born in Nassau, Anastacia grew up in Texas before returning to The Bahamas as an adult. After teaching stints on Andros and Long Island, she came to Eleuthera for a middle school science position. Desiring to reach a broader audience, she joined BNT last July as an Education Officer. In her role, she creates environmental education materials and interacts with daily visitors to the Leon Levy Native Plant Preserve.



Photo courtesy of Anastacia Rigby.

Anastacia first learned about Kirtland's Warbler in 2022, when a BNT Education Officer visited her classroom and her students participated in the Kirtland's Warbler Young Artists' Contest. "I didn't know anything about birds; I'm not gonna lie!" she laughed. Since that time, she has rapidly gained knowledge about Bahamian avifauna and saw her first Kirtland's last October as part of a natural history field course. "I'm happy to be part of the bird community! I now feel I know things and can talk with experienced birders. It's nice to share that passion and I'm more confident providing information to guests at the Preserve."

When asked about her goals for Kirtland's Warbler outreach and education specifically, she said, "I want to present content in a story format because kids engage with stories. I'm also developing an idea for a Kirtland's Warbler game. How can I bring play into learning?" This spring, Anastacia has been visiting classrooms to teach students about Kirtland's Warbler, running the same program that first introduced her to this special Bahamian bird.

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