

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2017-09-17 16:04:46
Observer's Name	Holger Pflicke
E-mail	pflicke.holger@gmail.com
Observer's Address	United States
Species (Common Name)	Kirtland's Warbler
Species (Scientific Name)	Setophaga kirtlandii
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	probable immature
Observation Date and Time	09-08-2017 8:10 AM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Yes
Link to eBird checklist	http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39061802
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Philadelphia
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	East Fairmount Park, Lemon Hill
GPS coordinates of sighting	39.973149, -75.189734
Habitat	Edge of a meadow/lawn with trees and undergrowth/shrubs
Distance to bird	as close as 10 feet
Viewing conditions	clear day, sunny
Optical equipment used	Nikon Monarch 10x42

Description

I was on my way back to the car when I checked this edge of the park again which gets the first light in the morning and is - good conditions provided - usually very active. At that point though not much was moving in the trees or shrubs until I put my binoculars on a bird that was foraging at about at mid-level in the trees (maybe 15-20 feet above ground). At first I thought it was a Magnolia Warbler - the first brief looks showed a bird with dark back and head, complete yellow underside with streaking along the flanks. But something did not feel quite right. Then the bird flew over to me in a lone tree just 10 feet from me. In flight and upon landing I got a very good look at the rather long tail and this was completely grayish from underneath, lacking the distinctive Magnolia Warbler pattern. At that point I was puzzled and tried to get focused on some key points (while deciding whether or not to reach for the camera). While the bird continued to forage these two things stood out first: the bird constantly moved/bumped its tail and the call which was a low level "chup", neither of which points to Magnolia Warbler either. Other ID features were the complete gray back, the lack of any obvious wing bars, no clear eye ring or arcs, yellow throat and the rather pronounced black side streaking that started at the birds shoulders and was rather "spotty" than "streaky". While mentally making notes of these points I eventually thought of Kirtland's Warbler and reached for the camera. At which point the bird decided to fly off, never to be seen again.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

Please see description above.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

The bird was foraging always alone and size comparison rather difficult, but since I thought of a Magnolia Warbler first this seems to be a good size estimate.

Magnolia Warbler was excluded by the lack of the tail pattern, lack of obvious wing bars, gray back and a kind of streaking along the flanks that looked different than on a fall Magnolia Warbler. The vocalization was also different from what I would expect from a Magnolia Warbler.

Canada Warbler has a similar color distribution but would still show a distinctive facial pattern in fall. It also lacks streaking along the entire flanks. And does not bob its tail.

The other tail-moving warblers - Prairie and Palm Warbler - were excluded based on the colors.

Other tail-moving birds with a similar color distribution could be Wagtails, but their tail would be much longer and the overall GISS would be much different.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

I will be honest and let you know that I do not have any experience whatsoever with Kirtland's Warbler. That's why it took me a while to think of it. However, I am very familiar with all warblers regularly occurring along the East Coast.

This kind of bird obviously sparked some interest and birders flocked to the place. Sara Busch reported a bird tail-bobbing with yellow-gray color distribution the evening on the same day, but was not able to ID (personal communication). Robin Irizarry saw a similar bird displaying the same tail-bobbing the morning after in the same area (ebird checklist: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39078282>).

Even though I missed to observe some key points like the color of the UTC or the shape and size of the bill I am confident the above discussed points support the observation of a Kirtland's Warbler.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

Yes, based on field marks and behavior

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