

Kirtland's Warbler in Chicago

On the morning of Friday, 13 September 1996, I decided to bird at Montrose Harbor's "Magic Hedge" in Chicago, since the previous night's winds were strongly from the northwest. A northwest wind tends to compress fall passerine migration along the Lake Michigan shoreline, offering the possibility of viewing thousands of birds. The Montrose Avenue area projects out into Lake Michigan, forming a natural migrant trap, and is arguably Chicagoland's most famous birding hot spot.

Unfortunately, the numbers of birds on this day were somewhat disappointing. After some aimless wandering around the many hedges, I settled down at the bushes southeast of the main hedge area to see what came along. A large, warbler-like bird was perched for a long period of time about 4 feet off the ground, feeding occasionally. It continually pumped its tail up and down, which puzzled me.

The bird had streaking on the yellow flanks and the breast and belly area were a dirty yellow. The back was brownish with light streaking. The bird was obviously not

a Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum*) because it lacked a rusty cap on the head. The face pattern was not strongly patterned as a Prairie Warbler (*D. discolor*). I dismissed it as an immature Magnolia Warbler (*D. magnolia*).

A few minutes later, Bob Hughes, a much more experienced birder, was loudly describing a Kirtland's Warbler (*D. kirtlandii*) from the other side of the same hedge. I went around and saw that the bird Hughes was watching was the same I had seen. After about 45 minutes of feverish excitement, watching this bird, Hughes and I left the hedge to call the Chicagoland Audubon Rare Bird Alert and other local birders. Fortunately, the bird was photographed by at least two individuals.

When we returned, the bird had disappeared, much to the disappointment of the many birders who had interrupted their daily schedules to rush to Montrose to see this rare warbler.

Although the bird was not relocated the next day, the bird was found again on Sunday and viewed by many under even better viewing conditions. The bird's leg



Kirtland's Warbler, immature male, Montrose Magic Hedge, Chicago. 15 Sept. 1996. Photo by Eric Walters.