

## Comment on Dustin and Schwab Paper “Consider the Kirtland’s Warbler”

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As the current and former heads of a parks and recreation department that has gone down the sport management road, we agree with many of the concerns Dustin and Schwab have articulated. However, we beg to differ with the universality and completeness of their ecological analogy.

Our major concern is with the universality of the analogy. The general theory of inter-species parasitism must account for adaptations to local conditions. The institutional context of our department in the 1990s favored development of our sport management program. Enrollments in the College of Natural Resources (CNR), our department’s home, averaged around 1,000 students, making CNR one of the smallest colleges in the 30,000-student university. Student interest in traditional natural resource programs was falling, and recruiting efforts were having only modest success. The new university chancellor considered reducing the number of colleges, and the new provost instituted a budgeting system based heavily on credit hour production. The very existence of the college was threatened, even though it was widely considered among the strongest in the country.

At the same time, student interest in sport management began to grow exponentially, but no other unit on campus could or would respond by offering a degree program. Physical education is not a degree-granting department at North Carolina State; there is no health science program; and the newly created business school was struggling to build its identity in the “management of technology” while drowning in business management student enrollments. Parks Recreation and Tourism Management (PRTM) was the logical campus home for sport management.

We believed then, and we continue to believe now, that it was in the department’s best interest for the college to continue as an independent unit, rather than having the departments re-assigned to other colleges. While our fit within CNR is not perfect, it is better than any alternative on this campus. The best way we could

help the college—and thereby ourselves—was by responding to the interest in sport management. Starting by offering a sport management option, and later moving to a major in sport management, our enrollments have risen steadily. With 672 students, we now have over half the students in the college. At the same time, the quality of our undergraduate programs is, if anything, improving; a much higher proportion of undergraduate student enter as freshmen, and their high school GPAs and SAT scores are equal to or better than in the past.

In planning our response to campus interest in sport management, we worked with the dean and provost to assure the additional student numbers would be matched by additional faculty and graduate student support. The university provided three new faculty lines and a new professional advisor position, and the college supplied expanded funding for graduate assistants. Beyond this agreed-upon support, other good things have happened; in particular, our department's willingness to help the college has led to hiring three full professors who are leading the development of our graduate programs and improving the scholarly culture of the department.

Of course, these gains are not without challenges. Sport management faculty members understandably seek the same professional identity and autonomy that parks and recreation faculty sought while fledging in physical education and forestry nests. As questions about specific things like the department's name and teaching loads arise, we have to counter a tendency to divide into camps. Fortunately, some ties that bind are already in place—e.g., numerous common undergraduate and graduate courses, an interdisciplinary research and outreach initiative involving half the faculty—and we continue to work to build more connectedness.

As two individuals who have wrestled with the cowbird/warbler issue for years, our message is that departments considering sport management need to assess their situations and decide whether the prospective benefits outweigh the costs. If this smacks of too much pragmatism, consider that higher education as a whole becomes more businesslike by the day, as evidenced by the growing numbers of campus presidents coming from business backgrounds. Just as Maslow's model of self-actualization requires first the satisfaction of basic needs, the core idealism of the parks and recreation field will thrive only if we attend to basic institutional concerns.

Our second point concerns the completeness of Dustin and Schwab's analogy. As they note, resource managers did reduce cowbird populations in an effort to protect the warblers. The result was that nest success and the number of fledglings per nest increased. However, because of habitat limitations, the overall population of warblers did not increase significantly. The one action that spurred an increase in warblers was accidental—a "controlled burn" got away from the managers and burned 24,000 acres (Winkler, 2002). The serotinous Jack Pine cones opened, new seedlings sprouted, and the Kirtland's Warbler population grew dramatically. One possible lesson from this more complete story is that in the larger scheme of things brood parasitism may turn out to be a relatively minor concern. Applying considerable poetic license to the analogy, the parks and recreation warbler and the

sport management cowbird may find it mutually beneficial and adaptive to work together in peaceful co-existence to address major societal issues like childhood obesity and senior adult wellness.

### Reference

Winkler, R. (2002, July 26). Endangered species protection: Kirtland's warbler. *National Geographic News*. Retrieved January 14, 2008, from <http://pages.cthome.net/rwinkler/kirtland's.htm>