

Michigan Audubon Society

PRESS RELEASE

2-4-64

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MIDLAND- If the Kirtland's warbler becomes Michigan's official bird, it will be unique among the feathered representatives of the 50 states.

It would, the Michigan Audubon Society notes, be the only warbler so honored. For the uninitiated, warblers are tiny but bright-colored insect eaters which have been dubbed "the butterflies of the bird world" by famed naturalist Roger Tory Peterson.

Too, the Kirtland's warbler would be the smallest of all the state birds. One of these friendly songsters from Michigan's jackpine country weighs only about a half ounce.

But it would not be the rarest on the list. The official choice of Hawaii is the Nene goose (pronounced nay-nay), a specialized cousin of the Canada goose which lives only high on the volcanic slopes of the 50th state. There are just 135 Nene geese on two of the Hawaiian islands, while an estimated 1,000 Kirtland's warblers exist today.

That's about 30 pounds of Michigan warblers, equal to the weight of four of the Pacific honkers.

State Audubon Society officials have proposed that the Kirtland's warbler replace the robin as the official bird of Michigan. It nests only in this state, they emphasize, and the world's only monument to a songbird stands on the Oscoda County courthouse lawn at Mio, in the heart of the famous bird's territory.

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The robin, Audubonists add, is also the state bird of Connecticut and Wisconsin and is far from a unique member of Michigan's wildlife community.

Action by the Michigan Legislature is required, and a resolution is expected to be introduced soon in the House of Representatives by Rep. Raymond L. Baker, a member of the House conservation committee from Berkley. Senate consideration would follow House adoption.

Every state, plus the District of Columbia, has named a state bird. Most have been given official status by lawmakers or by governors, although a few have been chosen by Audubon clubs or by similar campaigns. And in most instances, birds characteristic of an individual state have been designated, the Michigan Audubon Society points out.

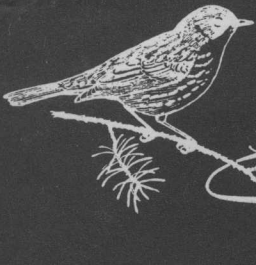
Minnesota's emblem is the common loon, symbolic of that state's northern wilderness and its thousands of lakes. South Dakota honors the ring-necked pheasant and New Mexico has picked its desert speedster, the road runner.

The state bird of Alaska is the willow ptarmigan, a grouse of the Arctic region which turns white in winter. California's symbol is the California quail, a relative of the bobwhite with a striking black plume. And domestic chickens have been picked by two states--the Rhode Island red and, in Delaware, the blue hen.

But there are many duplications. The cardinal has been named by seven states; six more have chosen the western meadowlark. Five "own" the mockingbird while the American goldfinch, like the robin, is the official bird of three states.

Maryland was the first state to adopt a bird, bestowing laurels on the Baltimore oriole in 1882. The accompanying state-by-state list tells who's who in the bird world.

Alabama--Yellow-shafted flicker
Alaska--Willow ptarmigan
Arizona--Cactus wren
Arkansas--Mockingbird
California--California quail
Colorado--Lark bunting
Connecticut--Robin
Delaware--Blue hen chicken
District of Columbia--Wood thrush
Florida--Mockingbird
Georgia--Brown thrasher
Hawaii--Nene goose
Idaho--Mountain bluebird
Illinois--Cardinal
Indiana--Cardinal
Iowa--American goldfinch
Kansas--Western meadowlark
Kentucky--Cardinal
Louisiana--Brown pelican
Maine--Chickadee
Maryland--Baltimore oriole
Massachusetts--Chickadee
Michigan--Robin
Minnesota--Common loon
Mississippi--Mockingbird
Missouri--Eastern bluebird
Montana--Western meadowlark
Nebraska--Western meadowlark
Nevada--Mountain bluebird
New Hampshire--Purple finch
New Jersey--American goldfinch
New Mexico--Road runner
New York--Eastern bluebird
North Carolina--Cardinal
North Dakota--Western meadowlark
Ohio--Cardinal
Oklahoma--Scissor-tailed flycatcher
Oregon--Western meadowlark
Pennsylvania--Ruffed grouse
Rhode Island--Rhode Island red hen
South Carolina--Carolina wren
South Dakota--Ring-necked pheasant
Tennessee--Mockingbird
Texas--Mockingbird
Utah--California gull
Vermont--Hermit thrush
Virginia--Cardinal
Washington--American goldfinch
West Virginia--Cardinal
Wisconsin--Robin
Wyoming--Western meadowlark



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1-22-64
with photo

MIDLAND- The Kirtland's warbler--not the robin--should be the state bird of Michigan.

That's the opinion of officials of the Michigan Audubon Society, and they have asked the State Legislature to consider such a change.

The robin, the MAS noted, was made the official state bird by legislators in 1931. This familiar red-breasted thrush had been the winner in a state-wide contest conducted by the society, in which nearly 200,000 votes were cast.

But the Michigan Audubon president of that era, the late Mrs. Edith C. Munger of Hart, predicted then that the robin's reign would someday end. A state bird, she said, should be characteristic, not just well known.

A change, she forecast, would come when nature study became a much more popular pastime and people became more familiar with Michigan's wildlife.

The Kirtland's warbler was little known 33 years ago. But this now famous songster, according to the current Michigan Audubon president, is "certainly deserving of official honors today."

Says Eugene E. Kenaga of Midland: "This colorful little jackpine inhabitant nests only in Michigan, and nowhere else in the world. Each year thousands of persons visit this state to see and hear and photograph the Kirtland's warbler. The world's only monument to a songbird now stands on the Oscoda County courthouse lawn at Mio.

"Several states have adopted the robin, Connecticut and Wisconsin included. But only Michigan can claim the Kirtland's warbler. There are just 1,000 of these birds in existence, and they have become a symbol of conservation in America. Federal and state agencies, private and local organizations, naturalists and sportsmen, all are working in its behalf.

"No member of Michigan's wildlife family is more unique, or more a symbol of our state's wonderful out-of-doors.



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MIDLAND- Support is growing for the Michigan Audubon Society's proposal to make the Kirtland's warbler the official state bird.

Resolutions endorsing the MAS campaign have been sent to legislators in Lansing by the Oscoda County board of supervisors, the Mio Sportsmen's Club, Mio Lions Club and the Chamber of Commerce there.

Delegates to the Michigan United Conservation Clubs Region II meeting at Roscommon gave their unanimous support to the move. And Audubon officials counted the U.S. Forest Service among the boosters of the unique and beautiful little bird's drive for state laurels.

Rep. Raymond L. Baker, of Berkley, said he has received several dozen letters from Lansing schoolchildren approving of the Kirtland's warbler as Michigan's feathered representative. He will introduce the necessary resolution in the House, while Sen. Thomas F. Schweigert of Petoskey and Sen. Harold B. Hughes of Clare have pledged their support in the State Senate.

Meanwhile, in a wholly unexpected development, Michigan Audubon Society learned the robin is not the official state bird, although it has been claimed as such since 1931.

In a quirk of fate which went undiscovered for 33 years, the Senate never followed the lead of the House of Representatives in approving a concurrent resolution "to designate and adopt the robin as the state bird."

The resolution was introduced in the House on April 8, 1931, and immediately adopted. It was forwarded to the Senate chambers the next day and referred to a committee, where it was apparently forgotten.

"This means," a Michigan Audubon spokesman noted, "that we have no state bird--legally--although the robin has been a successful pretender to the throne by default."