



Michigan Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 30028, Lansing, Michigan 48909

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
12 JULY 94

RESOURCE CONTACT: Thomas Weise
517-373-1263
MEDIA CONTACT: Susan Turney
517-373-2199

1994 KIRTLAND'S WARBLER CENSUS SHOWS 30 PERCENT INCREASE OVER LAST YEAR

LANSING--The 1994 Kirtland's warbler census indicates that Michigan's current population of the endangered bird is the largest ever recorded since the annual census began in 1951. Researchers, biologists and volunteers counted 633 singing males during the official census completed in mid-June.

This year's count is a 30 percent increase over the 1993 count of 485, and surpasses the previous record of 502 singing males counted in 1961. The numbers have increased every year since the record low of 167 singing males counted in 1987.

"This is great news, and it shows that the Endangered Species Act can and does work," said Department of Natural Resources Director Roland Harmes. "It is a testament to scientific wildlife management and the cooperation among the DNR biologists, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in restoring the warblers' needed habitat."

According to DNR Endangered Species Coordinator Thomas Weise, this year 92 percent of the warblers counted were located in Oscoda, Ogemaw and Crawford counties. Weise said, "The numbers of singing males found in nine northern Lower Peninsula counties were Alcona, 23; Clare, 2; Crawford, 46; Iosco, 16; Kalkaska, 3; Ogemaw, 153; Oscoda, 381; Otsego, 2; and Roscommon, 5. In the Upper Peninsula, one singing male warbler was reported in Baraga County and another was reported in Schoolcraft County. These Upper Peninsula sightings are

(more)



rare, although one was located in Marquette County in 1981 and 1982, and one was seen in Schoolcraft County last year."

The Kirtland's warbler is a small, blue-gray and yellow, sparrow-sized bird that nests only in jack pine stands located in northeast lower Michigan. As a ground nester, it selects stands of trees between five and 20 feet high, with branches that extend to the ground. Historically, these stands of young jack pine were maintained by naturally-occurring wildfires that frequently swept through northern Michigan. Fire suppression programs altered this natural process, reducing the Kirtland's warbler habitat.

Wildlife biologists from state and federal agencies now conduct a combination of clearcutting, burning, and replanting to mimic the effects of wildfire. This year, under the Kirtland's warbler management program, nearly four million trees were planted on 3,380 acres of state and federal land to provide additional habitat for warblers in six to 10 years.

These techniques appear to be successful. DNR wildlife biologist Jerry Weinrich of the Houghton Lake Wildlife Research Station said that this year the plantations showed a dramatic increase in the number of Kirtland's warblers using them. Fifty percent of the warblers counted in this year's census (314 males) were located in the areas specifically planted for the warblers' nesting habitat.

The Kirtland's warbler survey is conducted over a ten-day period each year during the first two weeks of June. The 1994 survey was a joint effort of the DNR, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Michigan Department of Military Affairs, and citizen volunteers.

For more information on the Kirtland's warbler, contact the DNR, Wildlife Division, Natural Heritage Program, P.O. Box 30180, Lansing, MI 48909-7680.

###