

**DNR NEWS**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
PO BOX 30028 LANSING MI 48909-7528FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
10 JULY 97CONTACTS: Thomas Weise
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LANSING—According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan's population of the endangered Kirtland's warbler is up from last year.

Biologists, volunteers, and researchers counted 728 singing males during the official 1997 census in early June, compared to 692 counted in 1996. The 1997 survey was a joint effort of the Michigan DNR, USDA Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan Department of Military Affairs, and citizen volunteers.

The census was started in 1951, repeated in 1961, and has been done annually during the first two weeks of June since 1971. A record high of 765 singing males was established in 1995; the record low was 167 in 1987.

The birds are counted by listening for their songs. In June, the male Kirtland's warblers establish territories and use their songs to help fend off rival males. The songs can be heard over one-quarter mile away, providing a method to census the birds with minimum amount of disturbance. The females do not sing. The total population is assumed to be double the number of singing males.

The number of singing males found in ten northern Lower Peninsula counties were Alcona 50, Clare 5, Crawford 119, Iosco 23, Kalkaska 23, Montmorency 2, Ogemaw 187, Oscoda 264, Otsego 26, and Roscommon 10.

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A record 19 singing males were found in three Upper Peninsula counties: Delta 4, Marquette 8, and Schoolcraft 7. This is the highest number counted in the Upper Peninsula since the first bird was found there in 1982. The production of young was confirmed in the Upper Peninsula in 1996. At least four females were observed with the males, indicating continuing nesting activity in the Upper Peninsula. An additional five singing males were located in northern Wisconsin.

"This is only the third consecutive year that mated pairs have been found outside of the traditional nesting areas in the northern Lower Peninsula," said DNR Endangered Species Coordinator Thomas Weise. "It was especially significant to confirm the production of young in the Upper Peninsula last year. It will be very interesting to see how these birds do in following years."

Kirtland's warbler numbers are directly related to the amount of available nesting habitat. The Kirtland's warbler is a small, blue-gray and yellow, sparrow-sized bird whose nests have been found only in jack pine stands in northern Michigan. A ground nester, it selects stands of trees between five and 20 feet high with live branches that extend to the ground. Historically, young jack pine were maintained in these pine barren areas by naturally-occurring wildfires that frequently swept through northern Michigan. Fire suppression programs altered this natural process, reducing Kirtland's warbler habitat.

Wildlife biologists and foresters from the state and federal agencies conduct a combination of clearcutting, burning, seeding, and replanting to mimic the effects of wildfire. Over 2,500 acres of jack pine trees were planted on state and federal lands in the spring of 1997. Over 1,000 additional acres will be planted in the fall. These plantations will provide habitat for warblers in six to ten years.

"The proportion of Kirtland's warblers counted in plantations specifically planted for warbler nesting habitat increased from 63 percent last year to over 69 percent this year," said DNR wildlife biologist Jerry Weinrich of the Roscommon Lower Peninsula Field Headquarters. "Even though new habitat will become available each year for the next several years, it will not immediately make up the difference in the loss of large habitat areas that are becoming too old for use by Kirtland's warblers. The

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numbers are expected to remain at about the same level until larger areas of new habitat become available in about five to six years."

"The success of the Kirtland's warbler management program shows that scientific wildlife management works. The cooperation among the DNR biologists and foresters, USDA Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Department of Military Affairs in restoring the warblers' nesting habitat is exemplary," said Gary Boushelle, Field Operations Supervisor, DNR Wildlife Division. "In addition to providing warbler habitat and forest products, the jack pine barrens provide valuable habitat for a wide variety of songbirds, game species, and plants."

This program is partially supported by contributions made to the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Fund. For more information on the Kirtland's warbler, contact the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, Natural Heritage Program, P. O. Box 30180, Lansing, MI 48909-7680. "Look for the Loon" on your Michigan income tax form to make a tax-deductible contribution.

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