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## RARE WARBLER MAKING COMEBACK IN MICHIGAN

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**Illustration:** Map

**Byline:** John Switzer

**Source:** Dispatch Columnist

**Column:** Weather

For years I've wanted to go to that state up north to see the remarkable work folks there are doing to save one of the rarest birds in North America.

The Kirtland's warbler, rarest of the warblers, is a 6-inch-long bird with a bluish head and back and a yellow breast.

They winter in the Bahamas and breed in a three-county area near Grayling, Mich. They pass through Ohio on their way north. Their breeding grounds are the jack-pine forests that grow near Grayling.

The birds are counted by the number of singing males found on the breeding grounds. A male will find a prominent perch and sing to impress females. Females are rarely seen. They remain in the undergrowth. In 1971 only 201 singing males were counted, and it appeared that the beautiful Kirtland's warbler was headed for extinction.

Since then, maintaining the specific breeding-ground requirements of the species and trapping brown-headed cowbirds have brought the warblers back from the brink. Cowbirds lay their eggs in the Kirtland's nest, and often the larger cowbird chick is the only offspring to survive.

The Kirtland's warbler nests on the ground, under overhanging branches of jack pines as tall as 18 feet. The birds will not nest in trees taller than that.

Wildlife officials have to maintain thousands of acres of the proper-size pines by burning or cutting and replanting trees.

Volunteers for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are now doing the census of singing males. They hope to find a thousand this year. Last year they counted more than 900.

I had to see this successful program for myself, so this week I drove with two friends 400 miles to Grayling. From mid-May through the first week in July, a Fish and Wildlife Service guide leads birders at 7 a.m. and 11 a.m. to the breeding grounds, which are normally closed to the public.

Tomorrow I'll tell you of my trip to the breeding grounds of the Kirtland's warbler.

**Caption:** Map

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