**Free Fishing Weekend set**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources annual Free Fishing Weekend will be held May 7 and 8. License fees will be waived for two days for all residents and non-residents on both the inland and Great Lakes waters. All the rules and regulations that govern fishing in Michigan will still apply. The DNR said in its weekly fishing report.

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**Outdoors**

**Back from near extinction**

**KIRTLAND’S WARBLER**

**GRAYLYN** — “They come from all over the world,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist Chris Menning, who was getting ready to set out with a small group of people in search of the elusive Kirtland’s warbler — one of the rarest birds in the world.

As it turned out, the two people who joined me on a recent tour were from the state of Washington and Vancouver, British Columbia. Even a person from Minneapolis, Minnesota, was among the group. The warblers were sought by all the members of the group.

Menning explained in the past the large tracts of jack pine forests that Kirtland’s warblers were created in, led to less nesting areas and a sharp decline in the bird’s population.

Today the National Forest Service and Michigan DNR are creating large tracts of jack pine forests through intensive forest management. About 150,000 acres have been set aside in the jack pine plantation looking for the tiny songbird whose whistle can be heard up to a quarter-mile away. Their numbers have now stabilized around 2,500, while the forest that has been a real turn around.

The rarity of the bird is the attraction for many birders.

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**Birds find unique perspective on the outdoors**

**MIGRATORY BIRD COUNT**

**GRAND TRAVERSE AREA is a birding paradise**

**BY LINDA GALLAGHER**

**Record-Eagle sports editor**

**NORTHPORT** — Pauline McClure, a resident of this small village near the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula for more than 15 years, has enjoyed her hobby of birding in some pretty exotic locations, like Belize, Costa Rica, and Manitoba, in the last couple of decades. Northport is her favorite place to observe a wide variety of birds.

“Right here in the Grand Traverse area,” the avid birder said.

McClure, along with other members of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club, recently compiled the results of the group’s annual Bird Count, which took place on May 7.

“The Grand Traverse area is a wonderful birding location,” she said. “Many people will stop to rest here before making the flight across the Straits of Mackinac on their way back north. We live in a special part of the country.”

Northport’s Pauline McClure was traveled to enjoy her favorite hobby of birdwatching.

During the course of the event, McClure and other members of the club spotted 126 different species of birds, including scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Red shouldered Hawk, and various species of ducks, all of which were not seen last year.

“Weather has everything to do with migration,” said McClure. “This year, it was much warmer, which explained why we saw Hummingbirds, something we didn’t see last year, when it was abnormally cold. “You never know what you’re going to see when you look through the field glasses, so it could be something you’ve never seen before.”

McClure added. “And Mid-May is one of the best times of the year to be out there. You’ll see Baltimore Orioles and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Bluejay, Throats, and a variety of warblers at that time of year, as well as a wide variety of warbler species that are passing through.”

Most noteworthy during the count was the sighting of a rare Merlin, a small raptor which has been spotted in the past along the shores of Grand Traverse Bay. The other birds noted by the birdwatchers included Sandhill Cranes, Common Loons, Wood Ducks, Black Capped Chickadees and Red-winged Blackbirds.

“Birding is something anyone can enjoy,” said McClure. “You can do it in your backyard.”

“All you need is a good pair of field glasses and a bird identification guide,” McClure said.

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**Free-guided tours of the Kirtland’s Warbler nesting area are available through the Audubon Society. Reservations are recommended for the tours, which are limited to 20 persons per hour that nests. Contact the Fish and Wildlife Service at 357-4660 for the Audubon Society.”