Many want rare
Kirtland's warbler
to replace robin

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A year after legislation
was introduced to change
the state bird from robin
to Kirtland's warbler, some
lawmakers and students still
are pushing for the change.

The robin has been the
state bird for more than
70 years, causing it a spot on
many state maps. The rare
warbler is lesser known but
has a passionate following.
Known by advocates as
"Kirt," the Kirtland's war-
bler nests solely in the jack
pine forests of northern
Michigan in North America
and spends winters in the
Bahamas.

State Sen. Patricia Birk- holz, R-Saugatuck Township,
introduced a bill prom-
oting the warbler. Len
Stuttman, co-chairman of
the Michigan Audubon So-
ciety's Kirtland's Warbler
Initiative, has campaigned
for about a year to get
legislators to hear the
bird's case.

Action is unlikely this
year, which means legisla-
tion would have to be rein-
troduced to be considered.
But groups of students
from across the state who
call themselves "Kids for
Kirt" believe they will be
able to change enough peo-
ple's minds about adopting
a new state bird.

In 1931, the Audubon So-
ciety promoted the robin to
be the state bird, and the
Legislature made it so by
resolution. But resolutions
expire after two years, and
Stuttman said that since leg-
islators forget to renew the
resolution, the state has of-
officially been without a bird
for 71 years.

"You see the robin on the
map and on various pictures, but
it's there by default."

Len Stuttman
co-chairman, Michigan Audubon
Society's Kirtland's Warbler Initiative

The bird, sometimes
called the jack pine wren
was on the verge of extinc-
tion in the 1960s and
In 1986, there were
than 400 pairs, but
covory efforts have f
on controlled burning
forests and planting
chumps of jack pines.

1,600 warblers now
are the state each spring
"It's a real study of
building the species,"
Stuttman said.

Because of the rarity
man said, the Kirt
warbler is a big dra
bird enthusiasts and
spur significant touris
season around its habitat.