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Contact: Dr. Lawrence Ryel,
Coordinator,
Surveys and Statistics
(517) 373-9516

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER CENSUS COMPLETED

LANSING--Michigan's rare Kirtland's warbler continues to maintain its tenuous existence.

The recently completed census revealed 213 singing males, all in northeastern Lower Michigan. Assuming a female is present for every male, then the world's breeding population is 213 pairs or 426 individuals.

Since 1971, the annual census figures have averaged 207 males a year. The 1984 tally is nearly the same as the 215 birds reported in 1983. Recent population levels, however, are well below that found in the first two years of the census--1951 and 1961--when 432 and 502 males were tallied, respectively.

The Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team, headed by John Byelich of Mio, has set a goal of 1,000 pairs. This is the level which biologists believe the birds should achieve before they can safely be considered out of immediate danger of extinction.

Some 50 workers from the Michigan DNR, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and local Audubon members conducted the Michigan census operation. In addition, potential breeding areas in Ontario, Quebec, Wisconsin, and New York were examined by other biologists, who found none of the birds.

Singing males found in Michigan by county in 1984 were: Crawford 79, Oscoda 71, Ogemaw 43, Kalkaska 15, Iosco 3, Roscommon and Montmorency 1 each.

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The Kirtland's warbler nests only in dense young stands of jack pine, which are created naturally as an aftermath of forest fires. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the Kirtland's Warbler Habitat Management Plan, prepared jointly by the Michigan DNR and U.S. Forest Service, has directed the management of the jack pine areas in northeastern Lower Michigan in order to provide continuing Kirtland's warbler habitat. Management practices include commercial timber harvests, prescribed burns, and planting. The first nesting habitat regenerated as part of this plan will be suitable for use by the warblers in the next few years. Wildlife biologists point out that the amount of nesting habitat currently available is very low.

Editor's Note: Warbler photos are available from the DNR Office of Communication, phone (517) 373-1214.

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