

MIO, MICHIGAN

Strictly for the BIRDS

By JOHN CALKINS

SOMEWHERE in the sunny Bahamas about thirty pounds of perky little birds are spending the winter nipping at bugs and seeds, oblivious to the tremendous stir of activity they've created up Michigan way, and especially in Oscoda County.

Cause of the big stir in the land of frozen mittens and runny noses is the Kirtland's Warbler, a half-ounce rarity of fluff and bird-bone. Experts say that only 1,000—perhaps less—of the tail wagging, yellow and gray warblers exist in the world, a total weight of about thirty pounds. While not yet on the "vanishing" list, they might be. For some bird-brained reason with origins in evolution, the Kirtland's Warbler is one of the world's fussiest homemakers. And that's at the root of all the stir.

Kirtland's Warblers nest in certain patchy stands of jack pine. But not any old jack pine. They choose young jack pine, but not too young. Generally it must be around 10 to 15 years old. The pine must have low growing, live branches. And it must be somewhere near the Au Sable River valley area—like Ogemaw, Oscoda and Crawford Counties, for example. Minnesota jack pine doesn't draw them. Nor does Manistee County jack pine in Michigan. While they fly thousands of miles each year on migrations, they nest only up here in the north-central part of the lower peninsula.

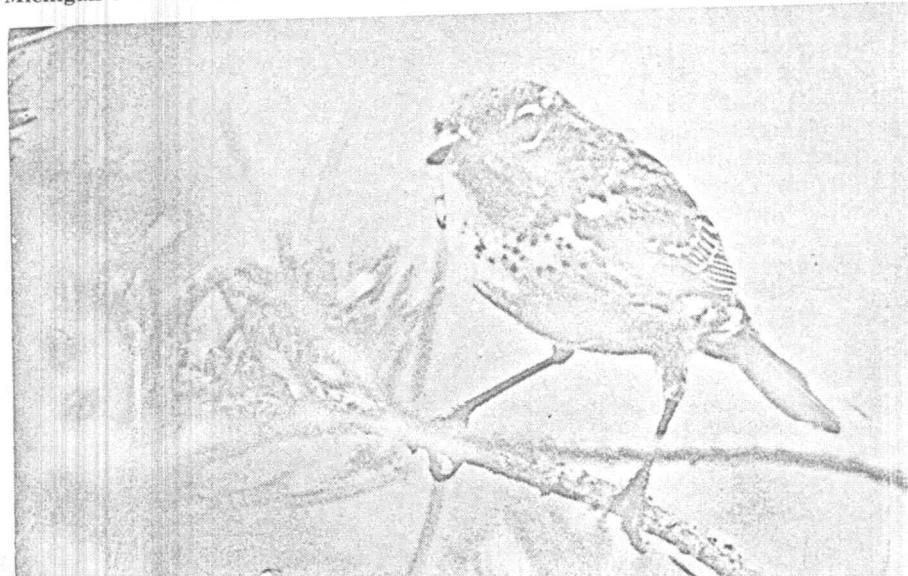
Right now, near Mio, power saws are roaring in the old growth jack pines on the newly dedicated Huron National Forest Kirtland's Warbler Management Area. Under a cooperative plan, Packaging Corporation of America has arranged to harvest up to 5,000 cords of mature jack pine timber from the first unit of 640 acres. In the plan devised by forest and wildlife experts of the U. S. For-

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(Left to right) Logger Charles Willobee; Asst. Forest Ranger Marion True; and Ivan Owen, Woods Supt., Packaging Corp. of America, check progress of timber harvest to set stage for first Kirtland's Warbler Management Area on Huron National Forest

Adult Kirtland's Warbler weighs only a half-ounce and wildlife experts estimate there are only about 30 pounds (about 1,000 birds) of these perky little birds left. Michigan conservationists are making sure they'll continue to have nesting grounds



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est Service, cutting is the first step in attaining the long range objective of more nesting habitat for Kirtland's Warblers. Logging crews of Ronald Reber and Charles Willobee of Mio are breaking the sound barrier in warbler management. As Willobee said recently: "This job is for the birds."

The Willobee-Reber operations involve up to 10 men and power saws with three tractors. It will result in nearly a year's woods work involving about 450 huge truckloads of pulpwood being hauled across the state to the pulp and paperboard mill of Packaging Corporation at Filer City. "Loading and hauling will involve 5 trucks, a bulldozer, a hydraulic loader, up to 8 men and 720 man days of work," according to Packaging Corporation's woods superintendent, Ivan Owen, of Mio.

Quite a total effort for 30 pounds of warblers. But that's not all. Michigan Audubon Society and affiliated

organizations have been aroused to the need, and contributions have been made to help the Forest Service carry on the nesting range program. The Michigan Department of Conservation has planted approximately one-quarter million trees in a Kirtland's Warbler plan and is increasing effort and research on state forest land. University of Michigan biologists and interested ornithologists of other organizations are co-operating. The warbler program on Huron National Forest land calls for extension onto more than 4,000 acres in coming years.

Jack pine seed trees left in the harvest will produce cones. By the spring of 1964, prescribed burning by professional foresters of the first mile-square cutover is planned. This will encourage the pine cones to give off seed. Meanwhile, another pulpwood logging will be in progress. Prescribed fire by professionals will follow logging again, and even-

tually the Kirtland's Warbler experimental area will be under a sixty-year rotation of logging-fire-re-growth-logging. The hope is that enough will be accomplished and learned to save the warbler from eventual extinction.

Plans call for signs to mark the area and for allowing visitors in the nesting season, by permit. Already the Mack Lake area southeast of Mio attracts bird lovers from throughout the nation who wish to add the Kirtland's Warbler to their life lists.

Meanwhile, back in the Bahamas, the world's Kirtland's Warbler population flits through the foliage and enjoys the sunshine whilst men and machines brave the bitter Mio winter for their salvation. Unaware of atoms and moonshots, the Kirtland's Warbler is also oblivious to the heartwarming fact that men still care for such a tiny wisp of evolution. ■

Britain's Churchyard Yews

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cient yews. Most of the outside shell has disappeared and only two portions of it, at approximately opposite sides of the tree remain. These are now so far apart as to look like separate trees with strange flattened trunks, the inner portions of which have no bark. These remains are growing comparatively vigorously, and as the tree is now a national monument, and is surrounded by a stone wall, it may well survive for further centuries.

Another ancient tree was much loved by Gilbert White, the curate-naturalist of Selborne. It still stands in the churchyard of the Hampshire village where he was born, lived, and died. With a girth of 27 feet, few yews are as healthy or can equal its spread of branches, and it is also one of the tallest of remaining yews. Although there is no direct evidence as to its exact age, it was mentioned in Saxon records of at least a thousand years ago.

Beautiful Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire, was started during the early years of the twelfth century, but there still stands a veteran yew

in Harlington, Middlesex, churchyard, was for centuries one of the great trees of England. It began life at least a thousand years ago. At five feet from the ground the trunk was between 24 ft. and 25 ft. in circumference. The main tree fell in 1959, and it took the men of the church council nine months to saw it up, but a substantial stump remains, about 20 ft. high. This has taken on a new lease of life and is growing vigorously.

The Harlington yew (or its rejuvenated stump) stands 30 ft. from the south door of the church, and it has been suggested that when, in ancient churches, there is found an old yew tree or the base of a cross on the south side of the building, about the center of the enclosure, it marks the spot on which used to stand the portable communion table erected by the first Christian mission priests well over a thousand years back—before the first earliest Saxon church was built and before the Normans rebuilt it in the twelfth century. There are yew trees in a similar position in the neighboring villages of Belfont

The branches have an exceptionally wide spread which, being horizontal and supported by wooden props, gives the appearance of a roof, under which worshippers walk to the church door. It is hundreds of years old; indeed, ten centuries is no exceptional age for a yew. One such veteran, in Gresford churchyard, North Wales, has a girth of 30 ft., and is still growing vigorously. One of its huge boughs spreads over the path and dozens of tombstones as well.

The old yew in Eastham churchyard, Cheshire, was often visited by the American author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, during the time he was American consul at Liverpool. It was also the goal of many nature rambles led by the famous churchman-novelist, Charles Kingsley, when he was canon of Chester Cathedral. He founded the natural history society in Chester. The exact age of the tree is a matter of conjecture, but it is probably between 1,500 and 2,000 years. In passing it may be said that the people of Darley, Derbyshire, claim that the yews in their churchyard are at least 2,000 years old.