

July 9, 1978

Kirtland's leave state

Two male Kirtland's warblers observed in early June seem to be prospering in central Wisconsin, says the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The bird, listed as an endangered species since 1969, is known to nest only in the West Branch-Mio-Grayling-Kalkaska area of Michigan.

Only 193 pairs — 25 fewer than last year's 218 — are nesting this year and Larry Ryel, chief of the DNR Office of Surveys and Statistics says it is doubtful that more birds will be located. Except for the birds in Wisconsin and two in Ontario, they comprise the entire world's population.

Nancy Tilghman, Wisconsin DNR wildlife ecologist, made the find on her last visit to a potential warbler site. It has been several years since a Kirtland's was spotted in Wisconsin. Only five previous sightings have been recorded.

The sighting was confirmed by John Byelich, retired Michigan Wildlife Division biologist and leader of the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team who trapped one of the birds which had been banded in Crawford County in 1972. However, he says the males had no females with them.

Byelich also confirmed sighting of two more birds near Petawawa, Ontario — also lone males. He theorizes that Kirtland's once nested in these areas and may be seeking new nesting areas.

In an effort to protect nesting birds, the Kirtland's area is closed to the public, however, guided tours are run daily at 7 and 11 a.m. out of the DNR's Grayling Field Office and every day but Wednesday out of the U.S. Forest Service's Mio district office through July 24. Reservations may be made by calling (517) 348-6371 (Grayling) or (517) 826-3717 (Mio).

The state-federal effort to protect the Kirtland's — even against the Michigan National Guard's tanks on whose range the birds nest — and provide new habitat started in 1971 when it was discovered only 201 pairs existed in the world.