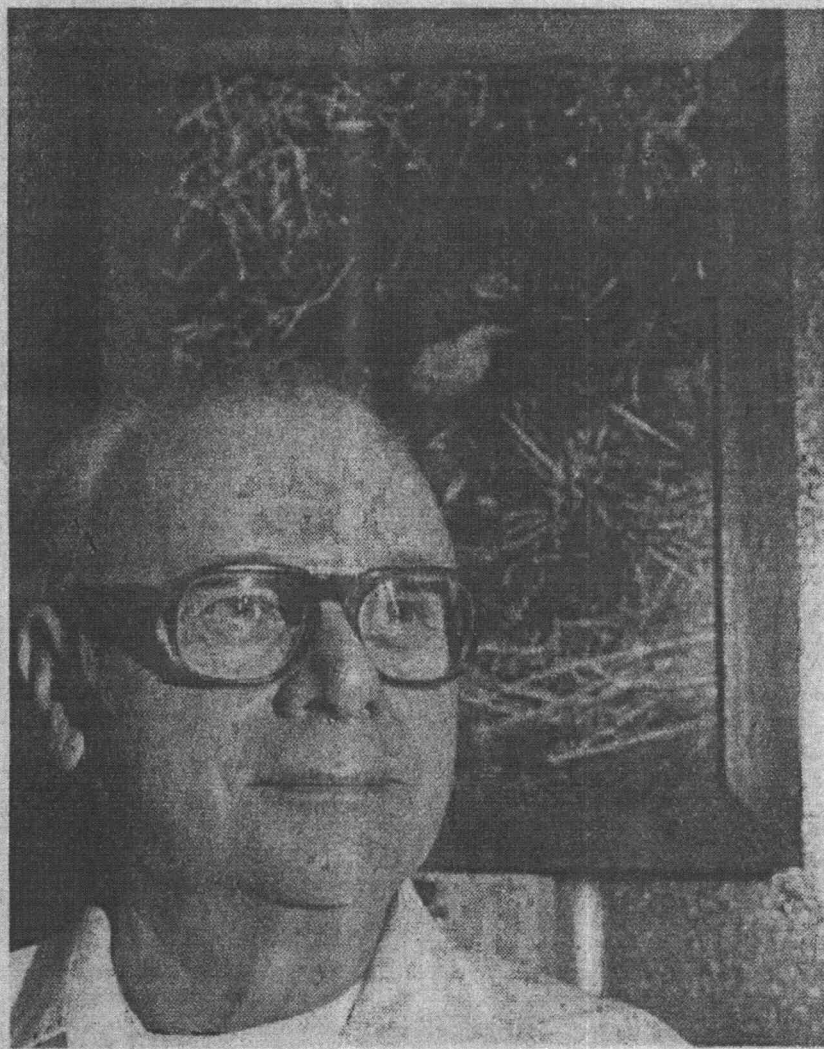


He's dedicated to endangered birds

Johnny Byelich retiring to



Johnny Byelich with Bob Harrington photo of Kirtland's warbler

By **FRANK MAINVILLE**
Outdoor Editor

Johnny Byelich is retiring as endangered species coordinator to do what he has been doing for the last 30 of the 33 years he has worked for the Wildlife Division — protect the Kirtland's warbler from extinction. —

Johnny hopes that, if he lives as long as his 91-year-old mother with whom he lives while he is in Lansing, he will see the tiny blue and yellow bird population "back on its feet again."

BYELICH RECALLS he had only the minimum courses in ornithology behind him when he moved from Gaylord to Mio in 1948 "and suddenly had the entire world's population of Kirtland's in my district."

Verne Dockham, Oscoda County conservation officer and amateur ornithologist who had been working with Dr. Josslyn Van Tine of the University of Michigan and Harold Mayfield, ardent amateur ornithologist who wrote "The Kirtland's Warbler", persuaded Johnny to take over.

"Verne was getting older and thought someone ought to take an interest in the bird," recalls Byelich. "We located and identified the first Kirtland's warbler refuges about 1959 in the Lovells area of Crawford County, old town of Red Oak in Oscoda and Damon in Ogemaw County."

DOCKHAM SWORE Byelich to maintain the secrecy of the Kirtland's warbler nesting areas — an oath he has kept to the chagrin of even the department's photographers. Byelich located one "show-and-tell" pair nesting some distance away from the other birds and sent people in to see them.

Over the years Byelich has worked closely with Dr. Larry Walkinshaw, retired Muskegon dentist and leading amateur ornithologist who has devoted 45 years to studying the Kirtland's, and Doug Middleton, who has helped Walkinshaw in banding the birds.

