

Nearly Extinct Warblers Found at 10-Year Peak

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MIO, Mich., June 21 — The population of the nearly extinct Kirtland's warbler has reached its greatest number in the last 10 years, a coordinator for the Federal Government said yesterday.

Lawrence Ryel, census coordinator for the Kirtland's Warblers Recovery Team appointed by the Secretary of Interior in 1975, said that 242 "singing males" were counted this year as opposed to 210 last year and a low of 167 in 1974.

The increase occurred despite the fire early last month that swept 25,000 acres of the Huron National Forest, of which

100 acres was used for nesting areas by the tiny song bird.

"The fire effectively reduced the territories for 12 birds, but they seemed to have found nesting territory in other parts of the Kirtland's sanctuary which weren't hurt," Mr. Ryel said in a telephone interview.

This jackpine forest area in the upper middle section of Michigan's Lower Peninsula is the only place in the world where the Kirtland's warbler is known to breed. The bird spends the winter in the Bahamas and returns to the nesting area every May 12 to 14.

The region has become a sanctuary supervised by the recovery team, which is composed of representatives of the National Forest Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and regional and local Audubon societies.

The team has successfully conducted a program to trap cowbirds who lay their eggs in the warbler's nest, crowding out the warbler's eggs. It is believed that the program is responsible for the increase in the Kirtland's population.

The Kirtlands are monogamous, and the census is taken by counting the sing

11-16 a
15-16 3/4 a
4 1/2 a
17 1/2 a
8 3/4 a
1 1/2 a
6 1/4 a
22
27
27
20
20
20
46
46
46
34
34
34
34

ing males, so-called because they perch on trees near their nests and sing to warn others to stay out of their territory.

No birds were found in a section of northern Wisconsin where one was found last year, nor in a section of Ontario Province in Canada where one was observed the last two years. But observers are still watching the two spots, Mr. Ryel said.

Controlled-Burn Maintenance

The jackpine habitat is maintained by the use of controlled burnings because it is only under the intense heat of fire that the tree's cone will pop its seeds.

The warbler's nest under the lowest branches of the jackpine, but as the tree reaches heights of 15 to 20 feet it loses these lower branches and the birds move

to shorter trees. So the recovery team burns over areas in which older trees grow.

It was a controlled burn that got out of control last month when strong winds came up unexpectedly and fanned flames across 25,000 acres, killing one Forest Service firefighter and destroying more than 30 residences.

Of the total, Mr. Ryel said that 9,000 acres was in the Kirtland sanctuary, with many trees scheduled for burning in coming years. He said the recovery team had not yet decided what the long-term impact would be on the program because it required eight to 10 years before the trees reached a height suitable to the warbler's needs.