

Concerns over endangered warbler population persist

Second in a two-part series.

By **JOELAMPOR**
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A small endangered songbird that raises its young in Michigan brought more than 200 experts and interested bird lovers to East Lansing this past weekend.

Ever since a drastic population decline from 1961 to 1971, experts have worked together to save the Kirtland's Warbler.

The birds spend their summers in Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula near Grayling. In this area, dense stands of jack pine interspersed with open areas and sandy soil fit the birds' sensitive habitat needs.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service work together to manage about 140,000 acres to fit these needs.

The warblers have forced even the Michigan National Guard to help save its nesting homelands.

THE CONFLICT between the Kirtland's Warblers and the guard occurred annually after the birds chose their summer nesting grounds — on training sites — forcing guardsmen to rewrite training plans.

Greg Huntington, the first full-time environmental coordinator for the Michigan Department of Mili-



tary Affairs, helped forge the truce that now allows the birds and humans to coexist peacefully.

In 1986, DNR and guard directors signed an agreement permanently setting aside 4,000 acres for the warblers, Huntington explained.

Camp Grayling, the military training facility involved, sacrificed the land in the "win-win compromise," Huntington said.

"THE BIRDS win in that we now have a permanent management unit (the 4,000 acre forest) that can be planned and maintained for their needs," he said. "The military wins in that we have our tank range for training."

But the question everyone wants answered remains: why, despite the efforts, has the bird's population not rebounded?

"Up until now, we've had essentially stationary populations," Mayfield said. "But, (the population) hasn't gone anywhere. We're doing

everything we know how. We're providing suitable forest with the aid of forest fire. We're keeping the cowbird off the warbler's back. We're putting up signs trying to create a sanctuary for the birds.

"I am pleased (the bird) is holding its own, but I'd be more confident if (the population) would increase with the help we've been giving it."

Experts hope the numbers begin increasing soon because the birds may face a grim future.

EAST LANSING native Doug Woodby, now a graduate student at the University of California at Santa Barbara, said the Greenhouse Effect eventually may force the bird out of Michigan and perhaps to extinction.

Using computer models, Woodby has hypothesized that jack pine stands in Michigan may decline "measurably" in 30 years and "drastically" within 60 years. Michigan jack pines are some of the most southern in North America.

The final effect for the warbler remains only to be seen, he said.

"(Predicted climate changes) are things we haven't seen for several hundred thousand years on a global scale," he said. "Nobody can say if it will happen."

Hopefully, the collaborative efforts of state and federal agencies, university researchers and a sensitive public will save the Kirtland's Warbler, he said.