

Free Fishing  
Weekend set

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources annual Free Fishing Weekend will be held June 7 and 8.

License fees will be waived for two days for all residents and non-residents on both the inland and Great Lakes waters. All the rules and regulations that govern fishing in Michigan will still apply. The DNR said in its weekly fishing report.

This is a great time of year for families to enjoy one of Michigan's premier outdoor activities.

Families should start planning now to spend some time together and enjoy some fishing.

At Charlevoix, fair to good fishing was reported for bass, walleye and trout. Anglers will want to concentrate on the south arm of the lake for bass when the weather warms up.

Some walleye have been caught off the Boyne River and the Pine River Channel. A few lake trout have been caught around Hemingway Point.

In Petoskey, anglers are fishing between the marina in Petoskey and Harbor Springs in the shallow waters as lake trout have been seen near the breakwalls and piers. A few brown trout and steelhead have been caught.

At Traverse City, slow fishing was reported in the West Bay. A few lake trout have been caught when trolling or jigging in 80 to 120 feet of water, but many of the fish were small.

Some whitefish have also been caught. Smallmouth bass and walleye were hitting on leeches or crawlers in the Boardman River. In the East Bay,

water the whitefish near Elk Rapids have slowed. In the Elk River, anglers have caught a few bass and steelhead.

At Manistee, the strong winds made for some slow fishing on the big lake. Only a few lake trout have been caught. Steelhead can still be found in some of the deeper holes in the Manistee River, but very few anglers have been fishing for them.

Inland lakes in the region are starting to warm up and the bluegills are now starting to bite. The bass are just starting to move onto the beds. Warmer weather should bring some very good fishing.

At Ludington, chinook salmon can be found in water 180 to 230 feet deep just south of the harbor. Anglers are fishing the top 40 to 60 feet of water and taking some nice fish on green and orange spoons.

9&10 NEWS  
Hook & Lure '09  
Some of the highlights from the annual Migratory Bird Count, which took place on May 10.

# Outdoors

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

## Back from near extinction

Kirtland's Warbler making a comeback

GRAYLING — "They come from all over the world," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist Chris Mensing, who was getting ready to set out with a small group of people in search of the elusive little Kirtland's warbler — one of the rarest birds in the world.

As it turned out I was also kind of rare. "I've been conducting the tours for four years," Mensing said. "I do them twice a week during the season, and I've had only a couple of people from northern Michigan in attendance. There have been people from as far away as England, Europe, lots from Canada and all over the United States."

As it turned out, the two people that joined me on a recent tour were from the state of Washington and Washington D.C. Even Ranger Mensing was from Lansing. He drives up twice a week to conduct the tour, which leaves daily from Grayling's Holiday Inn at 7 a.m. and again at 11 a.m.

You meet at the north end of the building where you are shown a quick slide presentation explaining the history of this unique warbler that nests and breeds only in northern Lower Michigan's jack pine forests.



MIKE TERRELL

Outdoors columnist

It nests only in young jack pine plantations that have numerous small grassy openings. The trees they seek must be the right height, five to 16 feet tall, which takes place when the trees are between eight and 20-years-old.

The warblers are very particular. Once it reaches 15 to 16 feet high, they abandon the area.

"That's why they almost became extinct," Mensing explained. "In the past the large tracts of jack pine that attracted Kirtland's warblers were created by natural wildfires. Man's control of wildfires in recent decades meant fewer new jack pine forests were being created, which led to less nesting area and a sharp decline in the birds population."

Today the National Forest Service and Michigan DNR are creating large tracts of jack pine forests through intensive forest management. About 150,000 acres have been set aside in the



Birders sight a Kirtland's warbler on a recent morning outing with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The tours depart from the Holiday Inn in Grayling every morning.

Jack pine plantation looking for the tiny songbird whose whistle can be heard up to a quarter-mile away. "Their numbers have now stabilized at around 2,000, which has been a real turn around."

The rarity of the bird is the attraction for many bird-

stand before we heard the first clear, distinctive call of the pint-size bird. Excitedly we came binoculars, as we looked hard in the direction of the sound. Sure enough a warbler was spotted sitting high on branch out in the stand of jack pine.

Special to the Record-Eagle/Mike Terrell

Free-guided tours of the Kirtland's warbler nesting area are available through the first of July. Reservations are recommended for the tours, which are limited to 20 persons per tour. Contact the Fish and Wildlife Service at (517) 337-6650 for the Grayling

wasn't discovered until around the turn of the century when a pair of trout fishermen heard an unfamiliar bird singing in the jack pine barrens along the Au Sable River. Norman A. Wood, the University of Michigan's curator of birds at that time, is credited with the first nest and identifying the small sparrow-sized bird's unique habitat and nesting needs.

In the early 1970's, due to a severe lack of favorable habitat, the tiny bird's numbers had dipped to less than 300 left in the world at the time. It was immediately placed on the endangered species list where it still remains today.

"The good news is that all the recovery methods have paid dividends," said Mensing as we walked down a grassy two-track amidst a

supper. The dedicated birder Steve Nord. "I've cataloged over 1,000 birds from the east coast to the west coast, and this may be one of the rarest I've seen."

When asked how successful we would be in actually seeing a Kirtland's warbler that morning, Mensing replied that every tour taken since early May, when they start, had spotted birds.

We hadn't walked even a quarter-mile into the jack

pine at will. Nests are built on the ground underneath spreading branches.

Through binoculars we were all able to get a good "up close and personal" look at the diminutive warbler — bright yellow breast and all. It was really neat to watch the tiny bird lift its little head with its gunmetal blue beak, fluff up and warble. That's what they do best.

Nesting areas are closed to the public from May through July. If you want to get back into them to see this elusive, rare little bird, you have to go on one of the scheduled tours. Bring powerful binoculars or a portable, high-powered telescope to really get a good look at a Kirtland's warbler. Camera equipment, unless attached to a telescope, won't do much good.

### MIGRATORY BIRD COUNT

## Birders find unique perspective on the outdoors

Grand Traverse area is a birding paradise

BY LINDA GALLAGHER  
Record-Eagle sports editor

NORTHPORT — Pauline McClure, a resident of this small village at the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula for more than 15 years, has enjoyed her hobby of birdwatching in some pretty exotic locations, like Belize, Costa Rica, and Manitoba, in the last couple of decades.

But her favorite place to observe a wide variety of bird species?

"Right here in the Grand Traverse area," the avid birder said.

McClure, along with other members of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club, recently finished compiling the results of the group's annual Migratory Bird Count, which took place on May 10.

"The Grand Traverse area is a wonderful birding location," she said. "Many birds will stop to rest here before making the flight across the Straits of Mackinac on their way back north. We live in a very special part of the world."



Northport's Pauline McClure has traveled to enjoy her favorite hobby of birdwatching.

During the course of the one-day event, McClure and other members of the club spotted 124 different species of birds, including Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Red-shouldered Hawks, and Ring-necked Ducks, all species that weren't seen last year.

"Weather has everything to do with migration," said McClure. "This year, it was

much warmer, which explained why we saw Hummingbirds, something we didn't see last year, when it was abnormally cold.

"You never know what you're going to see when you look through the field glasses—it could be something you've never seen before," McClure added. "And mid-May is one of the best times

of the year to be out there. You'll see Baltimore Orioles and Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks, Hermit Thrushes, and a variety of warblers at that time of year, as well as a wide variety of waterfowl species that are passing through."

Most noteworthy during the count was the sighting of a rare Merlin, a small raptor which has been spotted in the past along the shores of Grand Traverse Bay. Other birds taken note of by the birdwatchers included Sandhill Cranes, Common Loons, Wood Ducks, Black Capped Chickadees and Red-Winged Blackbirds.

Birding is something anyone can enjoy, said McClure, now in her 70's.

"All you need is a good pair of field glasses and a good bird identification guide," McClure said.

"You'll see birds everywhere, even in town. All of the birds I counted during our annual spring migratory count I saw in the downtown Traverse City area, along West Bay, and along the shores of Boardman Lake and the Boardman River, which was my appointed area that day."

"It's a great way to get outside and learn something. You'll see the world in a different light, and you learn

something every time you go out there, no matter how old you are."

Birding can also be rewarding, said McClure.

"Last summer, I found a nest of rare piping plover eggs, on the beach," she said. "That was really special."

McClure credited longtime area birders Martha Olson and Leonard Graf for her longtime and ongoing interest in birding, something she intends to do more of in future travels, which this year will include several tours led by the Michigan Audubon Society, and a trip to Maine.

"Birding is also a wonderful way to meet other people, and make new friends," McClure said.

McClure's favorite bird species?

"That's a tough one," she laughed. "I think I've adopted what Leonard Graf has always said — my favorite bird is whatever bird I'm looking at right now. It doesn't matter. You get a whole new outlook on nature just being there."

For more information on the Grand Traverse Audubon Club, which conducts three bird counts a year, contact Bob Carstens, Vice President of the group, at (231) 938-5976.