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INCREASE IN WARBLERS RETURNING TO MICHIGAN

LANSING--The tiny Kirtland's Warbler is on the increase, despite a fear by many that the tragic Mack Lake forest fire this spring would decrease its numbers, the Department of Natural Resources reports.

An annual census of the endangered bird, just completed, found a total of 242 males, 31 more than were found last year. Assuming an equal number of females, the total breeding population would be 484. That represents a 15 percent increase in the population since last year.

Fire is important to the warbler since it creates the heat necessary to open jack pine cones, so that seeds may be released. The fire also removes plant competitors and creates a bed of ash ideal for seed germination. The warbler nests in young jack pines in the spring and summer.

Encouraging as the 1980 survey results are, the number of singing males is still far below the numbers tallied in 1951 (432) and 1961 (502).

The survey was conducted under the direction of the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team and was a cooperative venture of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and local Audubon Societies. Dr. Lawrence Rye1 of the DNR's Wildlife Division was the overall census coordinator.

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