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WARBLER CENSUS: KIRTLAND'S HOLDING ITS OWN

LANSING---The recently completed census of Michigan's rare Kirtland's warbler indicates the bird is maintaining its current population levels.

"This year, 213 singing males were counted, compared to 207 in 1982," says Larry Rye1 of the Department of Natural Resources. "Assuming the presence of one female for every male counted, that's a total breeding population of 426 birds. Since 1971, census takers have counted an average of 206 male warblers a year, from 167 in 1974 to 242 in 1980. Current numbers, however, are well below the 432 males found in 1951 and the 502 found in 1961," says Rye1, who is in charge of Statistics and Surveys for DNR Wildlife Division.

Some 50 workers from the Michigan DNR, U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, plus several volunteers, located all but one of the birds in seven counties of northern Lower Michigan. The one exception was found in the west central Upper Peninsula. Leading counties were: Oscoda, with 79 males; Crawford, with 72; and Ogemaw, with 42. Similar searches in Ontario, Wisconsin and Minnesota failed to turn up any of the birds, Rye1 says.

The Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team, headed by former DNR wildlife biologist John Eyelich of Mio, is directing an extensive range management program on state and federal jack pine lands, designed to provide continuous habitat for a goal of 1,000 pairs of the birds.

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WARBLER CENSUS p2

The species nests only in dense young stands of jack pine, which spring up naturally, following forest fires. Management practices include commercial timber harvests, prescribed burns, and planting. Eventually, the habitat improvement will be carried out on some 2,700 acres annually.

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