



NORTH CENTRAL REGION NEWS

For Immediate Release
June 21, 1989

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Federal Bldg, Fort Snelling
Twin Cities, Minn. 55111

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ENDANGERED WARBLER FOUND IN WISCONSIN

The Kirtland's warbler has appeared again in Wisconsin. The small songbird is on both the Federal and Wisconsin lists of endangered species. Most birdwatchers and ornithologists think this warbler occurs only in Michigan in the nesting season, and only in the Bahamas during the winter months. However, one male Kirtland's warbler has recently been seen in northwestern Wisconsin. As many as eight males were believed to have been sighted at two locations last year. Prior to that the last verified sightings were in 1978 and 1979 in west-central Wisconsin.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources keep a close watch on this species in Michigan. In that state male warblers have been counted annually since 1971. The number of singing males has hovered slightly above 200, leading biologists to assume the population has been stable. Last year the Michigan census count increased to 207 males. The species is attracted to habitats which develop naturally following wildfires and occasionally following commercial clearcuts.

Some biologists believe many of the one-year-old Kirtland's warblers may stray from the traditional Michigan nesting grounds when they make their first spring return from the Bahamas. This possibility led the Fish and Wildlife Service to organize and fund surveys for the species in Wisconsin, Minnesota and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. State Department of Natural Resources personnel and volunteers have carried out the surveys.

Biologists do not yet know the significance of the Wisconsin sightings. The birds may be rare strays or the first members of new nesting colonies. People trying to catch a glimpse of this rare species can easily disturb the normal activities of the birds and prevent successful reproduction and colony establishment, according to biologists with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Biologists involved in efforts to conserve the Kirtland's warbler warn bird watchers to stay away from areas where the birds are located. "If these males are establishing new nesting colonies in Wisconsin, they will vastly increase

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the species' chances of avoiding extinction. I don't think any birders would like to think they might have contributed to the extinction of a bird species, so I'd advise them to avoid these areas," said James Engel, Chief of the Division of Endangered Species in the Fish and Wildlife Service's Twin Cities, Minnesota, Regional Office.

Law enforcement officers will patrol the areas to protect the endangered birds from human disturbance. Harassment of an endangered species--any disruption of the species' normal behavior--is punishable by a fine of up to \$25 thousand, Federal authorities say.

Birdwatchers wishing to see Kirtland's warblers should attend one of the tours offered at Grayling and Mio, Michigan, by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service. Singing male Kirtland's warblers are heard on virtually every tour, and most tour participants get to see the birds as well. Tour information can be obtained by calling 517-348-6371 (Grayling) or 517-826-3252 (Mio).

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