



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
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KIRTLAND'S WARBLER COUNT REMAINS HIGH

LANSING--According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan's 2000 population of the endangered Kirtland's warbler is the second highest recorded since the first census was taken in 1951.

Biologists, volunteers and researchers counted 891 singing males during the official 2000 census period completed in mid-June, compared to last year's record high of 905. The lowest numbers were counted in 1974 and 1987, when only 167 singing males were found.

The birds are counted by listening for their songs. The songs can be heard over one-quarter mile away, providing an accurate method to census the birds with minimum disturbance. Only the males sing, so the minimum breeding population is calculated as twice the count of singing males.

The number of singing males found in 10 northern Lower Peninsula counties were: Alcona 120, Clare 3, Crawford 241, Iosco 41, Kalkaska 32, Montmorency 2, Ogemaw 212, Oscoda 215, Otsego 15 and Roscommon 2. Eight singing males were found in four Upper Peninsula counties: Baraga 2, Delta 4, Marquette 1 and Schoolcraft 1. Females were observed with the males, indicating continuing nesting activity in the Upper Peninsula. The production of young has been confirmed in the Upper Peninsula each year since 1996. No singing males were reported this year in Wisconsin or Ontario.

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Kirtland's warbler numbers are directly related to the amount of available nesting habitat. The Kirtland's warbler nests have been found only in jack pine stands located in northern Michigan. As a ground nester, it selects stands of trees between five and 20 feet high, with live branches that extend to the ground. Historically, these stands of young jack pine were created by natural wildfires that frequently swept through northern Michigan. Modern fire suppression programs altered this natural process, reducing Kirtland's warbler habitat.

State and federal wildlife biologists and foresters now conduct a combination of clearcutting, burning, seeding, and replanting to mimic the effects of wildfire. More than 2,000 acres of jack pine trees were planted on state and federal lands this spring, and 1,000 additional acres will be planted this fall. These plantations will provide habitat for warblers in six to 10 years.

"The number of Kirtland's warblers counted in plantations specifically planted for warbler nesting habitat has continued to increase over the past several years; plantations had more than 76 percent of the population this year," said Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist, Jerry Weinrich, of the Roscommon Lower Peninsula Field Headquarters. "Additional new habitat will become available each year for the next several years, so we believe the warblers will increase over the next few years."

"The success of the Kirtland's warbler management program shows that scientific wildlife management works. The cooperation among DNR biologists and foresters, U. S. Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Military Affairs in restoring the warblers' nesting habitat is outstanding," said Pat Lederle, Endangered Species Program Coordinator. "In addition to providing warbler habitat and forest products, the program provides valuable habitat for a variety of plant species, songbirds, and game animals."

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The Kirtland's warbler survey is done over a 10-day period each year during the first two weeks of June. The 2000 survey was a joint effort of the Michigan DNR, U. S. Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan Department of Military Affairs and citizen volunteers.

For more information on the Kirtland's warbler, contact the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, Natural Heritage Program, Box 30180, Lansing, MI 48909-7680.

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