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## Warbler thriving

By JOHN PEPIN, Journal Staff Writer

MARQUETTE — Kirtland's warbler populations are continuing to climb statewide, with a record number of singing males discovered recently in the Upper Peninsula — the most since 1999.

Across Michigan, 1,478 singing males were located during a 10-day survey last month, up from 1,415 counted last year.

"For the last four years, we've seen a consistent increase," said Elaine Carlson, a wildlife biologist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in downstate Mio and statewide Kirtland's warbler survey coordinator. "That's the highest (number) we've seen ever."

The statewide total includes 21 males found over four U.P. counties, up from 18 males tallied here last year and 19 during a previous high count seven years ago.

Kirtland's warblers are counted by listening for their songs. Only the male birds sing. The songs can be heard more than a quarter mile away and provide an accurate method to count the birds while keeping the disturbance of their nesting activity to a minimum.

To guess at the total number of birds inhabiting a given area, biologists double the number of males they've found. This accounts for female birds.

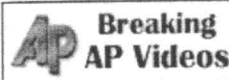
In this year's U.P. surveys, Delta County had the highest number of singing males of the four counties with seven, Schoolcraft County had six, Chippewa County had five and Marquette County had three. The Marquette County survey includes one bird found within three miles of a proposed Kennecott Eagle Minerals Company project site on the Yellow Dog Plains.

Females were observed with some of the singing males, indicating the endangered songbirds are continuing to nest in the local area. Since 1996, researchers have confirmed Kirtland's warblers have produced young in the U.P.



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Last year, Delta County had six singing males, while Luce and Schoolcraft counties each had four and Chippewa and Baraga counties each had two.

This summer, researchers also surveyed parts of Alger, Baraga and Luce counties because Kirtland's warblers were discovered there in the past. But no additional birds were found.

"They all had a lot of good habitat," Carlson said. "But finding the birds in the U.P., that's still like a needle in a haystack."

Carlson said many areas had more habitat than could be surveyed. Suitable nesting areas are beneath young jack pines ranging in age from 4 to 20 years old, with heights of a couple of feet to roughly six feet tall.

Fires are a component of jack pine habitat. In areas where fires or clear cuts have removed timber, Kirtland's warblers will return in subsequent years to nest. State foresters use a range of methods to mimic fire activity in certain areas, producing new Kirtland's nesting habitat.

Christie Deloria-Sheffield, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Marquette, said the Kirtland's warblers found this summer in the U.P. had shifted their choice of jack pine stands for nesting, compared to the benchmark 1999 survey year.

That summer, of the 19 males counted, 12 were discovered in Marquette County, with several of those found in a previously burned over area near Little Lake.

This year, only one of the sites surveyed was found in a similar prior burn area, in Delta County.

Kirtland's counts originated in 1951 and have been conducted annually since 1971. The birds are found in their highest numbers in the northern Lower Peninsula.

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Ishpeming Office: 118 E. Division, Ishpeming, MI 49849 906-486-4401 FAX: 906-486-8992

Marquette Office: 249 W. Washington, Marquette, MI 49855 906-228-2500 FAX: 906-228-3273

Munising Office: Room 109, 411 Elm Ave., Munising, MI 49862 News:(906) 387-3010 / Circulation:(906) 387-5424 FAX: (906) 387-4944

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