

Mio praised for caring for Kirtland's Warbler

Associated Press

MIO — U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt heaped praise on this small northern Michigan community for its efforts to save an endangered bird, saying he would like to bottle its spirit.

The bird is the 6-inch-long Kirtland's warbler, distinguished by its blue-gray back feathers and yellowish breast feathers. It makes its home in jack pines, and its only remaining habitat is several counties in the northern Lower Peninsula.

"I want to say to you that the reason I'm here is because of my admiration of your efforts," Babbitt said. "It's a model that I want to see across the United States."

"I'm going to bottle this spirit up and take it out West with me," said Babbitt, a former Arizona governor.

Babbitt went on a private Kirtland's warbler viewing tour early Friday afternoon. He said the group spotted one of the rare songbirds about three minutes into the tour.

The community is holding its first Kirtland's Warbler Festival, which ends today. Festival organizers invited Babbitt to attend.

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— Bruce Babbitt,
U.S. Interior Secretary

The festival coincided with the June 11 opening of the Jack Pine Wildlife Viewing Tour, a 50-mile road tour of the area's ecosystem and wildlife. Sponsors include local, state and federal governments, business groups, environmental organizations and Consumers Power.

"You don't see this type of partnership for a lot of endangered species," said Gary Boushelle, state Department of Natural Resources Region II biologist. "It's a very unique bird, and it's a very unique partnership between all of these people."

Babbitt shook hands and posed for pictures, praising some personally for their dedication to the bird.