

Recovery group bands together to save warblers

MI0 — It was early in the morning as we met recently at the Glen's Market parking lot here — six a.m. to be exact, and the sun wasn't up.

But the early bird gets the worm, and the early bazzler gets the bird ... or so it goes.

The small group I was meeting was part of the Kirtland's warbler recovery staff that had been ongoing since the early '80s. We were headed out to try and net the elusive little yellow bird for banding and study.

The program is a cooperative effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department, the National Forest Service and the Michigan DNR.

We drove several miles south of here, amidst the thousands of acres of jack pine forests that dominate this region of the state. That's where you find the endangered little songbird. One of the rarest birds in the world, it exists and breeds only here, among the jack pine of northern Michigan.

In fall the resilient little bird migrates to the Bahamas where it spends the winter. Like clockwork, they return each May to Michigan.

Discovered around the turn-of-the-century, the warbler dropped to a low estimate of 172 nesting pairs during the early '70s. Today that figure has climbed back up to 728 nesting pairs. The goal is 1,000. Their numbers have been recovering for the last decade, but it's still on the endangered species list.

Part of the problem with its survival is the very limited habitat the bird requires. It will nest only in young jack pine forests that have numerous small stress openings. The trees they seek must be the right height and age — five to 20 years old, no more. It's a pretty small window in an ecological



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time frame, and it requires continuous rejuvenation of jack pine forests.

In the past, the large tracts of jack pine forests that attracted the little songbird were created by natural wildfires. In Michigan's plan, jack pine forests are dependent on wildfires. The intense heat from fire is needed to open the jack pine cone and release their seed.

Man's control of wildfires meant fewer new jack pine forests, which led to less nesting areas and a decline in the Kirtland's warbler population.

Today, we are creating new jack pine forests through timber management. When a forest is harvested at 50 years of age, the area is replanted with jack pine seedlings. Over 150,000 acres of state and national forest land have been set aside under a 50-year rotation plan to assure the continued growth of new jack pine forests and a favorable habitat for the Kirtland's warbler.

The study looks at both survival rate and use of habitat by the warblers. Three teams of 10 to 12 people stretch across in designated areas of the forest each week throughout the summer to trap and band Kirtland's warblers.

That's where we were headed this early morning. You want to be out and set up as the birds start moving around day break.



Com Kepler holds a tiny Kirtland's warbler in his hands. The bird is truly native to Michigan.

Photo by Mike Terrell

That's often the most productive time of day according to John Gallogly with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"We like to set up early," she said. "The lights best to conceal the nets, and the heat of the day isn't a problem. By afternoon, it's often too hot to continue. The heat adds to the stress of the bird caught in the net. Cloudy days are ideal!"

Does getting caught in the net present a danger for the Kirtland's warbler?

"No," explained the officer. "When the nets are up, we walk the line every 15 to 20 minutes so a bird spends minimal time trapped in the net. We are all trained in handling birds and untagging them from the net. Once the bird is taken out of the net, it's dropped in a little white bag and taken back to the banding station."

"There it's checked over for age, weight, sex and banded for identification, unless it was previously banded. Then the bird is taken back to the exact same spot it was caught and released undisturbed. We've never lost a

bird.

At Jack would have it this morning, we got a bird almost immediately. Following Com Kepler, a member of the Biological Resources Division of the U.S. Geological Survey Department, it was easy to see how much training was needed to remove these little birds.

Kepler, a big man, knelt by the net, taking the tiny bird, which was dwarfed in one hand, size slowly untagging the warbler.

"This is one of the worst I've ever seen," he said. "Normally, we get them right out with little problem. This is a young juvenile, and he's not quite as relaxed."

After a couple of sharp chirps just present, the bird was unhooked. Kepler had the bird freed from the net, placed him in the bag, and we proceeded back to the banding station. A quick study revealed the bird was about three weeks out of the nest, still a juvenile, but almost on his own. The bird was banded and taken back to be

'Scenic river' offers new access sites

■ Pete Marquette has been made more available for anglers

By DON INGLE

Special to The Record-Examiner

BALDWIN — The U.S. Forest Service has made angler access to the Pere Marquette River, a National Scenic River, more available. Though several of the newly created access points are as yet not widely known.

We call them Angler Access Sites, though some of our older hunters say "Fisherman Access," which these days is not considered quite politically correct. But we had the signs on hand and are using them for now," said John Horschle, Marquette National Forest recreation officer for the Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger District.

The Pere Marquette was Michigan's first federally-designated scenic river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, because much of the river is lined with private properties, making angler access limited to only a few points. Creation of the new access points opens up more fishing opportunity for those who come to fish for the trout, salmon and other gamefish that make this stream popular with anglers.

"There are four sites now open for anglers to reach the river. They are Rosebush Bend, near Bowman's Bridge off of Carr Road west of Baldwin; Mapleleaf Access near Wabasha in Mason County; Indian Bridge on Rock Road, also in Mason County; and Upper Branch Bridge in Lake County.

Anglers will have to detour around Bowman's Bridge beginning on the 14th of July as the bridge is being closed for construction of a new bridge. The old bridge was literally falling apart, and is being replaced with a new bridge that will have both vehicle and pedestrian lanes for crossing the Pere Marquette.

"The Rosebush Bend and Mapleleaf access sites have park-

SPORTS



Joan Guilfoyle:

Here's the article that ran on Sunday. Stay in touch, if you have more of these type stories. I'm always interested, and I'll bring the doubts again.

— Mike Terrell