

Push for new state bird continues despite lack of progress



Michigan native: State legislators and a group of students are among those who want the Kirtland's warbler to become Michigan's official state bird. The rare bird nests only in Michigan when in North America and spends winters in the Bahamas.

Many want rare Kirtland's warbler to replace robin

By AMY DAVIS
Capital News Service

A year after legislation was introduced to change the state bird from robin to Kirtland's warbler, some lawmakers and students still are pushing for the change.

The robin has been the state bird for more than 70 years, earning it a spot on many state maps. The rare warbler is lesser known but

has a passionate following. Known by advocates as "Kirt," the Kirtland's warbler nests solely in the jack pine forests of northern Michigan in North America and spends winters in the Bahamas.

State Sen. Patricia Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township, introduced a bill promoting the warbler. Len Sturtman, co-chairman of the Michigan Audubon Society's Kirtland's Warbler Initiative, has campaigned for about a year to get legislators to hear the bird's case.

Action is unlikely this year, which means legisla-

tion would have to be reintroduced to be considered.

But groups of students from across the state who call themselves "Kids for Kirt" believe they will be able to change enough people's minds about adopting a new state bird.

In 1991, the Audubon Society promoted the robin to be the state bird and the Legislature made it so by resolution. But resolutions expire after two years, and Sturtman said that since legislators forgot to renew the resolution, the state has officially been without a bird for 71 years.

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map and on various pictures, but it's there by default," Sturtman said.

The Kirtland's warbler is an endangered species and is described by the Michigan Audubon Society as "one of the rarest birds in North America."

The bird, sometimes called the jack pine warbler, was on the verge of extinction in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1986, there were more than 400 pairs, but recovery efforts have focused on controlled burning of forests and planting clumps of jack pines.

1,600 warblers now live in the state each spring.

"It's a real study in building the species," Holz said.

Because of its rarity, man said, the Kirtland's warbler is a big draw for bird enthusiasts and has spurred significant tourism around its habitat.