



NORTH CENTRAL REGION NEWS

For Immediate Release
June 29, 1988

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Federal Bldg, Fort Snelling
Twin Cities, Minn. 55111

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Endangered Warbler Found In Wisconsin

Kirtland's warbler has reappeared in Wisconsin. The small songbird is on both the Federal and Wisconsin lists of endangered species. Most bird watchers and ornithologists think of this warbler as occurring only in Michigan in the nesting season, and only in the Bahamas during the winter months. Recently, however, several male Kirtland's warblers have been seen at two widely separated locations in western Wisconsin. The last verified sightings were in 1978 and 1979.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources keep a close watch on this species in Michigan. In that state the male warblers have been counted annually since 1971. During that period, the number of singing males has hovered slightly above 200, leading biologists to assume the population has been stable. Last year the census count dropped to 167 males. The species is attracted to habitats which develop naturally following wildfires and occasionally following commercial clear-cuts.

Some biologists believe many of the one-year-old Kirtland's warblers may stray from the traditional Michigan nesting grounds when they make their first return from the Bahamas. This possibility led the Fish and Wildlife Service to organize surveys for the species in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan this year. State Department of Natural Resources personnel and volunteers have carried out the surveys.

Biologists do not yet know the significance of the Wisconsin sightings. The birds may be rare strays or the beginnings of new nesting colonies. People trying to catch a glimpse of this rare species can easily disturb the normal activities of the birds and prevent successful reproduction and colony establishment.

Federal and Wisconsin wildlife law enforcement officials stress that Federal regulations prohibit the harassment of endangered species. Harassment is defined as any disruption of the birds' normal behavior, and is punishable by a fine of up to \$10,000. Law enforcement officers will be patrolling the areas to protect the endangered birds from disturbance.

Biologists who are involved in the efforts to conserve the Kirtland's warbler warn bird watchers to stay away from areas where the birds are located. "If these males are establishing new nesting colonies in Wisconsin, they will vastly increase

(over)



the species' chances of avoiding extinction. I don't think any birders would like to think they might have contributed to the extinction of a bird species, so I'd advise them to avoid these areas," said James Engel, Chief, Division of Endangered Species, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Twin Cities, Minnesota, Regional Office.

Bird watchers wishing to see Kirtland's warblers should attend one of the tours offered at Grayling and Mio, Michigan, by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service. Singing male Kirtland's warblers are heard on virtually every tour, and most tour participants get to see the birds as well. Tour information can be obtained by calling (517) 348-6371 (Grayling) or (517) 826-3252 (Mio).

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