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# Guided tours offered to see rare warbler

Outings start at  
Grayling Hotel  
through July 4

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GRAYLING — Guided tours are being offered as a way for bird enthusiasts to catch a glimpse of the Kirtland's warbler.

"Most birds you can go and see them in various areas of the country, but not the Kirtland's warbler. They're very unique, very rare," said Chris Mensing, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The endangered half-ounce, yellow-breasted bird nests in five- to 20-year-old jack pine forests in northern Michigan, after spending its winters in the Caribbean.

Last year a record number of singing males — 1,341 — were counted in Michigan. According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 1,202 were found in 2003, and 1,050 in 2002.

Census figures in 1974 and 1987 showed only 167 males. The decline was blamed on forest fire suppression techniques aimed



Associated Press file photo

**Endangered bird:** This

June 2001 photo provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources shows a Kirtland's warbler.

at jack pines, which reduced the number of young trees the birds needed for nests.

But the DNR, the U.S. Forest Service and other agencies have worked to maintain a suitable nesting habitat for the warblers.

Joe Gomola, field biologist with the forest service, said more than 1,000 bird-watchers come from all over the world every year for a chance to see an endangered warbler and hear its song.

Tours begin today at 7 a.m. and 11 a.m. and run every day through July 4 from the Grayling Holiday Inn. The tours are led by guides from the wildlife service, Huron-Manistee National Forests and the Michigan Audubon Society.