

# 'Extinct' bird rediscovered in Myanmar after more than 70 years



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**BY - MARCH 6**

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The bird's last confirmed sighting was in July 1941, near the Sittaung River close to a town called Myitkyo in the Bago region in Myanmar.

The small brown bird – about the size of a house sparrow – was discovered on May 30 last year when the team led by WCS were surveying a site around an abandoned agricultural station that still contained some grassland habitat.

Upon hearing the bird's distinct call, the scientists played back a recording and were rewarded with the sighting of an adult Jerdon's babbler. And over the next two days, the team saw more of the birds in the immediate vicinity and managed to obtain blood samples and photographs of them.

The Jerdon's babbler was once common to Myanmar's vast grasslands that once covered flood plains around Yangon, and had only dwindled in numbers when agriculture and communities took over the grasslands.

"This discovery not only proves that the species still exists in Myanmar but that the habitat can still be found as well," said the director of WCS's Regional Conservation Hub in Singapore, Mr Colin Poole.

"Future work is needed to identify remaining pockets of natural grassland and develop systems for local communities to conserve and benefit from them."

With the rediscovery, it is now considered as one of the three subspecies found in the Indus, Bhrmaputra, and Ayeyarwady River basins in South Asia. All three from the species show subtle differences and may yet prove to be distinctive species, the WCS said.

NUS's Department of Biological Sciences has taken the bird's DNA samples to study if it should be considered a full species. If the test is positive, the species will be exclusive to Myanmar.

This discovery is part of a larger study to understand the genetics of Myanmar bird species and determine the true level of bird diversity found in the country.

Myanmar has more species of bird than any other country in mainland Southeast Asia, said WCS, and this number is likely to increase as our understanding of birds in this long isolated country continues to grow.