

Afghanistan protects newly rediscovered rare bird

February 28 2010, By KAY JOHNSON , Associated Press Writer



Mustafa Zahir, director-general Afghanistan's National Environment Protection Agency, shows a photo of a rare bird during a press conference in Kabul, Afghanistan on Sunday, Feb. 28, 2010. Afghanistan's fledging conservation agency moved Sunday to protect one of the world's rarest birds after the species was rediscovered in the war-ravaged country's northeastern mountains. (AP Photo/Ahmad Nazar)

(AP) -- Afghanistan's fledging conservation agency moved Sunday to protect one of the world's rarest birds after the species was rediscovered in the war-ravaged country's northeast.

The remote Pamir Mountains are the only known breeding area of the large-billed [reed warbler](#), a species so elusive that it had been documented only twice before in more than a century.

A researcher with the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society stumbled upon the tiny, olive-brown bird during a wildlife survey in 2008 and taped its distinctive song. Later, a research team caught and released 20 of the [birds](#) - the largest number ever recorded.

On Sunday, Afghanistan's National Environment Protection Agency added the large-billed reed warbler to its list of protected species, which was established only last year.

Mustafa Zahir, the agency's director-general, acknowledged the difficulties of trying to protect wildlife in a country preoccupied with the Taliban insurgency. On Friday, suicide attackers killed 16 people in Kabul, the capital, and thousands of Afghan and NATO forces are fighting to root out the hard-line Islamists from their southern stronghold.

But Zahir, who is the grandson of Afghanistan's former king, said the discovery of the large-billed reed warbler provided some welcome positive news.

"It is not true that our country is full of only bad stories," Zahir said. "This bird, after so many years, has been discovered here. Everyone thought it was extinct."

The bird's discovery in Afghanistan kicked off a small flurry in conservation circles.

The large-billed reed warbler was first documented in India in 1867 but wasn't found again until 2006 - with a single bird in Thailand. The Pamir Mountains, in the sparsely populated Badakhshan province near China, is now home to the world's only known large population of the bird.

The Afghan environmental agency also added 14 other species to the

protected list on Sunday. It now includes 48 species including the rare [snow leopard](#), the Asiatic cheetah and the markhor, a type of wild goat with large spiral horns.

While conservation efforts are in their infancy in Afghanistan, there have been some recent successes. Authorities in Badakhshan last week seized a snow leopard from villagers who had trapped it and planned to sell it. The snow leopard - one of an estimated 150 left in the wild - will be freed once its injuries from the trap are healed, Zahir said.

©2010 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Afghanistan protects newly rediscovered rare bird (2010, February 28) retrieved 4 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-02-afghanistan-newly-rediscovered-rare-bird.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.