blackstart, Arabian babbler and great grey shrike were not found, although these were all present in lower areas where acacia is present. Going up the mountains, however, the vegetation was especially interesting at about 1,500m with fig trees, wild dates, willow and pistachio trees as well as the first juncipers which go all the way to the summit. The most interesting tree is the wild almond which gives the mountain its name, and which is found nowhere else in Arabia. They were in full bloom in late March, but not yet in leaf in the coastal wadis. Common partridges were numerous. Common winter visitors still present in the area included black redstart and desert lesser whitethroat. At 1,900m Sinai roosting rock pipits first appear and were quite numerous all the way to the summit, although they were also to be found at much lower altitudes in the Hima sandstones to the east. In the summit area, nest records for kestrel, scrub martin, spur-winged plover, brown-necked and fan-tailed raven were present. The outstanding observation of the day was a fine pair of adult Verreaux’s eagle which circled the summit as I reached it.

Approaching the summit I was lucky enough to see a fine group of five ibex which gently walked away from me at only 200m distance the other side of a ravine. The first confirmed ibex record from the reserve. Very fresh tracks of a wolf were seen in one of the higher wadis. One of the most botanically interesting is the Jabel al Lawz is one of the only two places in Arabia where tulips can be found. I saw lots of plants, and many in bud, but only one was fully opened; a delightful little white flower with a yellow centre.

All in all, 21 resident species were found in the Jabel al Lawz area in the three days spent there. It is likely that several other resident species occur and, almost certainly, additional breeding summer visitors will be found, especially when the deciduous trees of Wadi Lakus are in leaf. M.C.J.

DOVES UPDATE

Phoenix 2:2, 3:3 & 4:3 have chronicled the several doves and pigeons which have extended their range in Arabia in the last few years. The march of the Eurasian collared dove has continued across Arabia. In the central land mass of Saudi Arabia the range creep is easily monitored through its occurrence on the various trans-Arabian routes. Figure 4 shows what has happened recently.

The Arabian House Crow is an agile, intelligent bird which has its origins in the mid-latitude parts of Europe. Its habits have made it a pest species locally. Its predatory habits on other species, especially nestlings, contributes to their being very few other birds to breed in the Aden district. The only other birds to be seen regularly in Aden were a few black kites, roose-ting parakeets, house sparrows, bulbuls and blackstarts. Just inland, where the older crows are less numerous, one meets typical Tihama country species such as the chanting goshawk, red-eyed dove, black bushchat, African silverbill and Ruppell’s weaver.

My travels in South Yemen took me all the way along the coast to the Oman border where at Al Haf one can find coastal hills that are heavily forested and a tangle of vegetation made possible by the fact that the monsoon just touches this part of Arabia. Here, and in the adjacent Dhofar province of Oman, one can find a number of Afro-tropical species which have visited the eastern part of PDRY, it is clear to me that the Al Haf/Dhofar zone is, in fact, an island of Afro-tropical species rather than the end of a continuum from the more northern Yemen. By far the larger part of eastern PDRY is clearly dominated by Palearctic desert species. The effect of the highland zones which run through PDRY, on the distribution of montane species could not be fully assessed due to lack of time. It will take another visit to establish, for example, if the Arabian red-legged partridge, South Arabian whitethroat and a few other species extend the full length of the country. It is unlikely that many Afro-tropical species or other Arabian endemics do so.

Fan-tailed raven and Tristram’s grackles were especially common throughout eastern PDRY and especially numerous in coastal settlements. The fan-tailed raven was a particular target at certain times of the year at fish-drying areas which form an important part of the local economy. No notable raptor movements were observed during this period, although there was considerable migration over the country at this time of the year. However, one group of white storks was seen thermalling along the coast at Huwairah (PA06). Suckling’s gull was recorded on some coastal rocks.

The Egyptian vulture was widespread in small numbers, but not one griffon vulture was recorded. A single lappet-faced vulture, the second record for PDRY was observed at Al Haf in March. The Egyptian was observed at fish-drying areas which form an important part of the local economy. No notable raptor movements were observed during this period, although there was considerable migration over the country at this time of the year. However, one group of white storks was seen thermalling along the coast at Huwairah (PA06). Suckling’s gull was recorded on some coastal rocks. The Egyptian vulture was widespread in small numbers, but not one griffon vulture was recorded. A single lappet-faced vulture, the second record for PDRY was observed at Al Haf in March.