**Desert Eagle-Owl breeding in Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area, central Saudi Arabia**

The Desert Eagle-Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* is known to breed widely in central and other parts of Saudi Arabia (Jennings, 2010) but it has never been recorded breeding in the extensive Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area (HB21, IA21). Since 1991 the Mahazat has been an important re-introduction site for several threatened species that include Arabian Oryx *Oryx leucoryx*, Sand Gazelle *subgutturosa* and Mountain gazelles *G. gazella*, Asian Houbara *Chlamydotis macqueenii* and Red-necked Ostrich *Struthio camelus*. It holds a very important nesting area for a variety of Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos* (Shobrak, 1996) and is an Important Bird Area under BirdLife/IUCN criteria.

This owl has been recorded in the reserve in late autumn and early winter but on 1 April 2013, we found six nestlings of this owl under a large rock in the reserve at 22°23’ N, 41°49’ E and an adult was present nearby (photo page 11). This record is exceptional as there has never been a record of a clutch of six eggs recorded in Arabia before, so six nestlings is quite remarkable when it is considered that almost always with this species, eggs will be lost or infertile and chicks will die. The chicks were observed for a week in the area and after that they disappeared. It seems likely that an unknown predator is responsible for the missing nestlings because they would not have fledged in such a short period.

With this report the number of proven breeding birds in this plains reserve stands at 24, out of a total of 201 recorded species within the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area.

**References:**

- Khairi Ismail and M. Zafar-ul Islam, National Wildlife Research Center, PO Box 1086, Taif, Saudi Arabia (mzafarul.islam@gmail.com).

**Collared Pratincoles in Saudi Arabia lacking white trailing-edge to wing**

By Jem Babbington

Whilst birding at Sabkhat Al Fasl (PB30), Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia in April 2013 I saw a flock of ten Collared Pratincoles *Glareola pratincola* with at least three birds lacking the normal white trailing edge to the secondaries. The first bird lacking the white trailing edge was seen on close inspection to have rufous underwing coverts, making it a Collared or Oriental Pratincole *G. maldivarum*. The lack of white trailing edge and rufous underwing coverts are features of Oriental Pratincole so I took a few photographs of the bird. One with its wings stretched showed clearly the lack of a white trailing edge to the secondaries (page 11). The bird then flew and was joined by the other birds, all of which seemed to be Collared Pratincoles, although two more also lacked the white trailing edge. A few were typical Collared Pratincoles with long tails and a broad white trailing edge to the wing in flight. When resting on the ground there did not appear to be any difference in size, plumage or colouration between any of the birds and as a result I came to the conclusion that they were all Collared Pratincoles. Oriental Pratincole has not been recorded in Saudi Arabia but I thought I should get a second opinion on my identification. I sent some photos of these birds for comments to a few people with extensive knowledge of the species including Gerald Driessens, Lars Svensson and Brian Small. Gerald and Lars are the authors of an excellent identification paper on Collared and Oriental Pratincoles (Driessens, G & Svensson, L. 2005. Identification of Collared Pratincole and Oriental Pratincole – a critical review of characters. *Dutch Birding* 27: 1-35). Although the birds clearly lacked a white-trailing edge to the wing other pointers indicated they were Collared Pratincoles. For example the tail pattern where the rufous tail shows a small amount (20%) of black on the outer tail feather on the Oriental compared to usually about 50% on the Collared Pratincole, which could be seen on the those birds without white-trailing edge to the wing in flight. Other pointers towards Collared Pratincole were white primary shaft streaks, the breast band not grading broadly onto the underparts, the pale tips of the secondaries are too washed out and there is too much merging with the dark part of the feather. On Oriental, you see a sharp demarcation with the pale fringe (if there is a fringe in the first place). The conclusion from all parties was that the birds are Collared Pratincoles but these pictures certainly show that you need very good views of a vagrant bird before coming to the conclusion it is an Oriental Pratincole.

Surprisingly quite a few (about 25%) of the Collared Pratincoles I have seen in spring in Saudi Arabia appear to lack an obvious white trailing edge to the wing. As a result I also wondered if these birds were one of the African sub-species, *G. p. erlangeri, G. p. fueelleborni* and *G. p. riparia*, known as ‘Afrotropical Pratincola’ in the Driessens & Svensson paper. They were obviously not because the bill and head patterns of these should look more like Oriental Pratincole and the necklace should have a less obvious pale inner throat surround to the black border, which was not shown by these birds, even though they showed a long black gape line stripe. Gerald Driessens mentioned he was unable to find some skins with a very narrow white-trailing edge to the wings, and some with completely worn off trailing edges. This was not the case with the birds I saw as they were in fresh plumage. Since seeing the birds I have found a comment on similar birds seen near Riyadh by Per Anders Bertilsson in his privately published Saudi Arabia bird report 1998-2001 where on 28 April 2000 he saw three individuals at Thumamah (MB27). Two of these, totally lacked the white trailing edge to the wings and appeared darker above with black underwing coverts. On closer inspection he could see a suffusion of red-brown on the underwing and the length of the tail also supported that they were Collared Pratincoles. From longer distances, individuals like this may very well be misidentified as Black-winged Pratincoles *G. nordmanni*. It would certainly be very interesting to know the origin of these different looking or