



# The Cuckoo

or eat one of the bird's own eggs, replacing it with her own. Because the egg of the cuckoo is very small and varies in colour, these birds do not notice that the egg is not their own.

When the cuckoo chick hatches, it is blind and naked. When it feels the other chicks in the nest rubbing against it, it wriggles about until it pushes the other chicks out of the nest. The foster mother doesn't notice the dead chicks outside the nest and continues to look after the cuckoo chick, as her own.

The sound of the cuckoo is a real sign that spring has arrived. Returning in April from its winter home in Africa, the cuckoo is more often heard than seen. Both the male and female bird are the same size, roughly 30cm in length. They are similar to sparrowhawks but are bluish grey in colour, with a white underneath. The male's call, "cuckoo" or "cuck-cuckoo", is more often heard than the female's bubbling call.

Cuckoos don't build their own nests. In May and early June the female lays her eggs in the nests of other birds, particularly Dunnocks, Meadow Pipits, and Reed Warblers. These other birds only discover that these chicks are not their own, only after having cared for them. The cuckoo will remove and destroy,



## Fact File

**Colour:** Adult has blue-grey head and back, white underneath with black bars and yellow feet. Wings are spotted.

**Length:** 32-36 cm

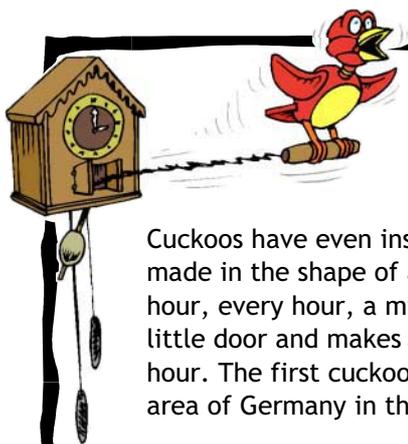
**Diet:** Insects and their larvae, with caterpillars being their favourite.

**Habitat:** Woodlands, farmland, coastal fields.

**No. of eggs:** 12-13 (each in a separate nest of "host" birds)

The cuckoo chick grows very quickly, needing continuous feeding by the foster mothers, and though the chick grows much bigger than even the foster mother, no notice is taken of this.

The cuckoo's own parents take no further interest in the chick and having left its foster mother's nest, the young bird must find its own way to the wintering habitat in Africa. This is often in late September, when the older birds would have already gone.



## Cuckoo Clocks!

Cuckoos have even inspired clocks! These clocks are usually made in the shape of a chalet or little wooden house. On the hour, every hour, a miniature cuckoo comes out through a little door and makes a "cuckoo" sound to announce the hour. The first cuckoo clocks were made in the Black Forest area of Germany in the 1700s.

**Help record the first sighting of the cuckoo this spring. Visit [www.springalive.net/](http://www.springalive.net/)**