

Cuckoo Mother-Life
THE CLIMAX OF ~~BIRD~~-LIFE.

For special and excellent reasons of their own, some birds may build earlier in the season, some not until midsummer, but for the great majority May is the month of happy achievements; jealousies of courtship have given place to blissful content; every moment is filled with happy, profitable labour. Sometimes both lovers busy themselves with the home building; perhaps the wife does all the manual work, while the mate merely makes her pretty speeches, approves her every act, applauds her industry, her skill, cheers her by his constant presence and such music as love alone inspires. What of that? She is perfectly satisfied; these May days are her realization of Paradise. Whatever is best in the nature of both mates at least temporarily triumphs over the base; for however selfish birds may be at other seasons, in May they are truly one in purpose and sympathy. According to their temperament, some work impulsively with outbreaks of rollicking ecstatic, passionate song like the wren, or with steady persistence and the serene hymn of the thrush. At last the end crowns the work: the building of the nest embodies all that is greatest in a bird's life.

HOW THE YELLOW WARBLER OUTWITS
THE CUCKOO

There are still many lazy, slovenly, indifferent, commonplace or utilitarian home makers among undeveloped or degenerate birds as among humans, but happily only one of our birds disgraces itself, like the European cuckoo, by refusing to make a home

and to perform any domestic duties whatever. When other virtuous nest builders are working and singing from morning till night, the cuckoo, a dark, silent, decadent relative of those charming songsters, the oriole, bobolink and meadowlark, skulks about alone, slyly looking for the chance to drop an egg in the nest of some little warbler or vireo—any small, weak, tender-hearted foster-mother she can find—leaving to various such victims the labour of hatching and rearing her scattered brood. A serious task indeed awaits the over-burdened little mother who must feed a great gaping gourmand in the cradle with her own crowded and half-starved babies.

But there is at least one ingenious little architect among the cuckoo's special victims whose wits frequently save it from such misfortune. Finding a strange egg in its cup-shaped nest and being unable to roll it out, the yellow warbler proceeds to weave a new bottom, effectually sealing up the cow-bird's egg and preventing the heat from her brave little heart from warming it into life. Suppose this "wild canary," as it is often called, had already laid her own eggs in the nest at the time of the cowbird's visit: what then? In this case the warbler does not hesitate to sacrifice them, sealing them up with the cowbird's by weaving a new bottom above them, rather than hatch out one interloper to worry and starve her brood. Where a second persecution has taken place, two new cradle bottoms have been woven. If you ever have the good fortune to find a two or three storied nest, you may be sure it belongs to this little Spartan mother.



1-50 *Cuculus canorus* L., Gemeiner Kuckuck

Figure on previous page: N.N., "Gemeiner Kuckuck", in Johann Naumann, *Naturgeschichte der Vögel*, Köhler, Gera, 1905, p. 73.

CUCKOO (*CUCULUS CANORUS*)*Species Common Cuckoo | Order Cuculiformes | Family Cuculidae | Class Aves*

As lazy as this particular bird is to breed and feed, so in love it is.

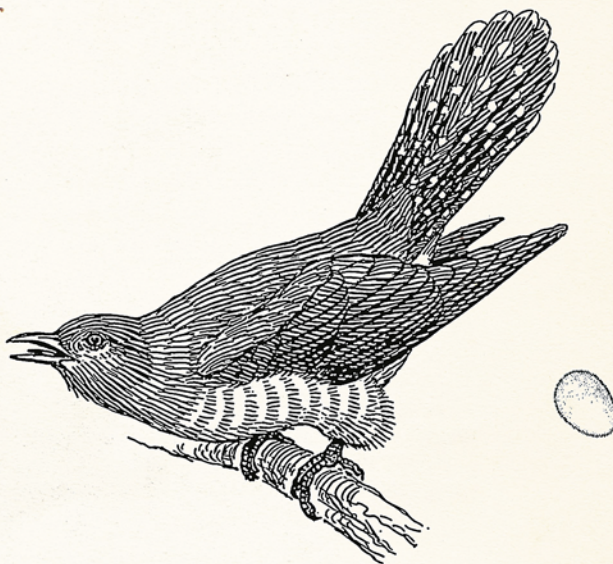
My teasing with the cuckoo, which I repeat each spring and at every opportunity, has taught me that, unlike most breeding birds who claim a bounded area and drift around in the manner indicated, the female cuckoo does not respect such boundaries.

It made a peculiar impression on me, when hearing the cuckoo's call during my night hunts even after eleven o'clock at night and before one in the morning. During summer it rather randomly wanders around various areas of the admirers, not binding to any of them but rather abandoning oneself to all who seem agreeable, not allowing to get wooed but instead setting out on love adventures all on its own and with its longings having been satisfied afterwards no longer cares about the lovers which have just been favored.

When the cuckoo-mother has happily housed her egg in the host's nest, which might occur every two days, it goes off afresh on amorous escapades. When entering the immediate proximity of an admirer that calls out with sighs of love, the female cuckoo gives a peculiar sonorous giggling or laughing lure which consists of the very rapid successive sound „jikirickick“, which may also ring out in our ears like „quickwickwick“, resembling hard trills that are introduced by a very faint hiccup, that can only be heard nearby. The call is tempting, promising, granted in advance with its effect on the male being downright magical. Immediately the male bird leaves his perch luring „guguh, guguh, guguh“, probably as well doubles this expression of highest excitement for then chasing after the female. This repeats the invitation with again the lover responding while all the screaming males within earshot also fly over, and a fantastic chase begins. It is not uncommon for a female to be followed by two, three, even four males. That one encourages the applicants by

giggling again and finally putting them in a loving frenzy.

With multiple swings, it flutters between tree tops and bushes, one or the other male immediately behind, the second following at a varying distance, each one eager to become the next and probably happiest applicant. Every single cuckoo involved ignores the teasing small birds around, that are accompanying the wedding procession, forgets even the usual duels, or but only once and the other time, as it were occasionally, pushes on the hated rival; everyone strives the uttermost with yes no time to waste.



Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*). 1/2 of actual size.

The female is no less excited than its entourage, the most ardent lover being also certainly the most welcome, its apparent brittleness being nothing more than the endeavor to cheer on any of them even more. The cuckoo mother just doesn't know the boundaries of marriage, willingly and without resistance it gives itself to every opportunity available, never without uttering lots of noise, doubled luring and luscious giggling.

My obvious conclusion would be, that by this free and fickle behavior of the cuckoo mother-bird, certain still puzzling occurrences during the laying of this species' eggs are the easiest and most satisfying explained. —

