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HELVE⁺IA

Magazine for Members of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc

FAUNA IN SWITZERLAND

Common Cuckoo

The Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*, is a widespread summer migrant to Europe and Asia, and winters in Africa.

The cuckoo family gets its name for the call of the male Common Cuckoo, usually given from an open perch, goo-ko. During the breeding season the male typically gives this call with intervals of 1-1.5 seconds, in groups of 10-20 with a rest of a few seconds between groups. The female has a loud bubbling call.

Its food is insects, with hairy caterpillars, which are distasteful to many birds, being a speciality. It also occasionally eats eggs and chicks.

The Common Cuckoo is a brood parasite, which lays its eggs in the nests of other bird species, particularly of Dunnocks, Meadow Pipits, and Eurasian Reed Warblers.

At the appropriate moment, the hen cuckoo flies down to the Reed Warblers' nest, pushes one Reed Warbler egg out of the nest, lays an egg and flies off. The whole process is achieved in only about 10 seconds.

Cuckoo chicks methodically evict all host progeny from host nests. It is a much larger bird than its hosts, and needs to monopolise the food supplied by the parents. The Cuckoo chick will roll the other eggs out of the nest by pushing them with its back over the edge. If the Reed Warbler's eggs hatch before the Cuckoo's egg, the Cuckoo chick will push the



other chicks out of the nest in a similar way.

At 14 days old, the Cuckoo chicks are about three times the size of the adult Reed Warblers. The numerous and rapid hunger calls of the single cuckoo chick (which perfectly mimic the cries of a whole brood of warbler chicks), and to a lesser extent its coloured gape, encourage the host parents to bring more food.

Cuckoo chicks fledge after about 20-21 days after hatching, which is about twice as long as for Reed Warblers. If the hen cuckoo is out-of-phase with a clutch of Reed Warbler eggs, she will eat them all so that the hosts are forced to start another brood.

from the internet

When I was a child the saying went that you wouldn't be short of money all year if you had money on you at the first call of the cuckoo. One year I borrowed a 10 cent piece from my mother's purse and kept it faithfully in the pocket of my apron, dreaming and scheming how I would contribute to our finances. Well, the apron went into the washing, my mother must have wondered about the coin when she found it. And I heard the first cuckoo in that spring without money in my pocket, and therefore was unable to contribute to the Brühlmann finances... tb