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OPINION

The cuckoo: A fascinating tale of deception and survival

A.F. Mammadov

Institute of Bioresources of the Nakhchivan Branch of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, 10 Babek St., Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

**Corresponding author E-mail: amammadov@gmail.com*

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Nature is a treasure trove of remarkable adaptations and behaviors that never cease to amaze us. One such remarkable creature is the Cuckoo (Clamator glandarius), a bird known for its cunning and deceptive ways. The Cuckoo, often associated with its distinctive call, has earned a place in folklore and science alike for its unique behaviors and intricate relationships with other species.

Keywords: Great spotted cuckoo, Mating, Breeding season.

Introduction

The Cuckoo, Clamator glandarius, belongs to the family Cuculidae, which includes various species of cuckoos found worldwide. It is a medium-sized bird, approximately 32-34 centimeters in length, with a slender body and long tail. The adult Cuckoo has a striking appearance, characterized by its ash-gray plumage with bold black and white stripes, giving it a distinctive and eye-catching look.

Cuckoos are primarily found in Europe, Asia, and North Africa, inhabiting a range of environments, including woodlands, forests, and open countryside. Their distribution is quite extensive, allowing them to interact with a diverse array of bird species (Soler, M., 1990).

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Cuckoo's biology is its breeding behavior, which is often described as "brood parasitism." Unlike most birds that build nests and raise their own young, the Cuckoo employs a clever and somewhat ruthless strategy. Female Cuckoos lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species, particularly small songbirds such as warblers and pipits. The unsuspecting host birds then incubate and raise the Cuckoo chick as if it were their own. To achieve this remarkable feat of deception, the Cuckoo employs a variety of tactics. The female Cuckoo closely mimics the appearance of the host bird species to avoid detection while laying her eggs. Additionally, the Cuckoo eggs often hatch earlier than the host's eggs, giving the Cuckoo chick a head start in competing for food from the foster parents. In some cases, the Cuckoo chick may even evict the host's own eggs or chicks from the nest, ensuring all available resources are directed towards its survival (Soler, M., et al., 1995).

Description

Co-evolution and arms race

The relationship between Cuckoos and their host species is a fascinating example of co-evolution and an ongoing evolutionary arms race. Host species have developed various strategies to counter the Cuckoo's parasitic behavior. Some birds have evolved the ability to recognize Cuckoo eggs and remove them from their nests. Others have learned to identify Cuckoo chicks by their distinctive calls and will either abandon the nest or push out the imposter chick. In response, Cuckoos have continued to refine their mimicry and deceptive tactics to increase their chances of successfully infiltrating host nests. This ongoing battle of wits between the Cuckoo and its hosts has led to a dynamic and complex interplay of adaptations that continues to intrigue researchers and naturalists (Canestrari, D., et al., 2009).

Conservation status and future outlook

The Cuckoo faces various challenges in the modern world, including habitat loss, climate change, and changes in host populations. Some host species have been declining, potentially impacting the Cuckoo's reproductive success. Conservation efforts focused on preserving the habitats and ecosystems in which Cuckoos thrive are crucial to their long-term survival.

The Cuckoo's unique behaviors and interactions with other species make it a captivating subject of study for scientists seeking to understand the intricacies of animal behavior, co-evolution, and adaptation. As we continue to unravel the mysteries of this fascinating bird, we gain a deeper appreciation for the complexity and wonder of the natural world (Avilés, J.M., et al., 2004).

The Cuckoo (Clamator glandarius) stands as a testament to the ingenuity of nature. Its deceptive breeding behavior and ongoing co-evolutionary struggle with host species paint a vivid picture of the lengths to which creatures will go to ensure their survival. As we observe and study the Cuckoo, we are reminded of the delicate balance that exists within ecosystems and the remarkable strategies that have evolved over millennia (Molina-Morales, M., et al., 2012).

The Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*), designated by Linnaeus in 1758, boasts a wide distribution encompassing tropical Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean region of Europe. Within its central range, crested cuckoo populations display sedentary tendencies, whereas those in South Africa, the Middle East, and Europe partake in migration.

It is widely assumed that all avian populations of this species spend their winter months on the African continent. Notably, the Great Spotted Cuckoo employs an obligate nesting parasite strategy. Its favored breeding hosts primarily consist of corvids, along with select long-tailed and spray starlings. These species construct their nests in hollows, burrows within sandy cliffs, and piles of stones. The specific species include *Lamprotornis spp.*, *Onychognathus spp.*, and *Spreo bicolor*. Among the protective sentinel birds are the blue Cyanopica cyanus and common Pica pica magpies, the black Corvus corone, the gray *C. cornix crows*, and occasionally the *Garrulus glandarius* jay, *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* bough, *Corvus monedula* jackdaw, *C. monedula* common, and *Corvus corax* bristly black *C. rhipidurus* (Martínez-Zunzarren, N., et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Throughout the Mediterranean and European regions, the breeding season of the Great Spotted Cuckoo is in sync with its primary breeding host, the magpie, occurring from late April to early June. The fledglings depart their nests by the end of May and continue to be present until November as they prepare for their winter migration. In Spain, adult birds conclude their breeding activities by mid-June, whereas the juvenile population remains until the onset of August. Records of the crested cuckoo's presence are well-documented in various Western and Eastern European countries, as well as Turkmenistan. This species has been documented in the Turkish region, but its occurrence has not been officially documented in the territory of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

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