

Common Cuckoo

Cuculus canorus

Bird · Summer migrant · Apr-Jul



Photo by Andy Morffew from Itchen Abbas, Hampshire, UK, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

A slim, long-tailed, grey bird with barred underparts and pointed wings, easily mistaken in flight for a sparrowhawk — a resemblance that may help it approach nests unchallenged. Cuckoos arrive in late April and are birds of open country: moorland edge, rough grazing and reedbed rather than gardens. They have declined steeply in Britain, though Scotland has held up better than England.

BEHAVIOUR

The female lays a single egg in the nest of a host — usually meadow pipit on the Galloway moors, or reed warbler and dunnoek elsewhere — timed to match that host's own laying, and often mimicking its egg colour. The cuckoo chick hatches first and heaves the host's eggs over the side, then is fed by foster parents a fraction of its size. Adults leave for Africa remarkably early, many by the end of June.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Cuckoos (Cuculidae)
SIZE	32–34 cm · about the size of a small pigeon
UK STATUS	Red-listed

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