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The Cuckoo: the Uninvited Guest

Oldřich Mikulica, Tomáš Grim, Karl Schulze-Hage and Bård Gunnar Stokke

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The familiar call of the male Cuckoo echoing across reed beds and moorland is widely recognised throughout Europe as a harbinger of spring; yet few have witnessed the intimate details of the life of this most elusive bird except those who dedicate their lives to observing and studying the behaviour of one of nature's most devious cheats.

The stunning photography of Oldřich Mikulica charting the lifecycle of the Cuckoo from furtive egg laying to foster parents feeding a monstrous chick is incredible testimony to a man who has devoted almost four decades to studying these fascinating brood parasites. Few will have had the opportunity and privilege to capture beautifully the moment that a female Cuckoo is attacked by a Great Reed Warbler pair; the leviathan challenge of ejecting host eggs and chicks facing every Cuckoo hatchling; or the moment a young Cuckoo launches itself from the nest box in which it was lovingly reared by its Common Redstart hosts. One feels virtually transported to the watery habitat in which most of the scenes were played out and insightfully captured by the photographer's experience, patience and skilfully positioned lens.

Mikulica's captivating imagery however, only tells one half of the story in this book with the remainder being ably written by the small team of experienced Cuckoo researchers Tomáš Grim, Karl Schulze-Hagen and Bård Gunnar Stokke. Their highly informative narrative perfectly accompanies the photographic story; documenting all aspects of Cuckoo biology and ecology, as well as the evolutionary arms race being continually run by Cuckoos and their range of host species. There are chapters covering nest parasitism; egg mimicry; chick and fledgling behaviour, as well as theories and research into the complex co-evolution of brood parasitism. The most sobering, sadly covers the worrying steep decline of the species in Europe.

With a forward by Nick Davies, behavioural ecologist and author of '[Cuckoo - Cheating by Nature](#)', I cannot recommend this most recent addition to the body of literature exposing the secrets of the Cuckoo's deception highly enough. But it is surely the breathtaking camera work, sensitively illustrating every facet of the life of this fascinating species that will keep the reader coming back to this book.

Justin Walker

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