

NEST PARASITISM

The cuckoo (**Cuculus canorus**) is the best known nest parasite. The cuckoo waits for the host bird to leave the nest and then lays its own egg within 5-8 seconds. The cuckoo usually lays one egg in a nest, but there are cases where up to four or five cuckoo eggs are found in one great reed warbler's nest. Of these, however, only the first to hatch will fledge. The host bird usually accepts the cuckoo egg, but it regularly throws it away or leaves the nest. The cuckoo egg may resemble the host's eggs in colour and size. An important characteristic, however, is that the cuckoo nestling hatches in a shorter period of time than the nest host's chicks. After about 10 hours after hatching, the young cuckoo will instinctively start to evict anything it finds in the nest, whether it is an egg or a chick. This odd behaviour is vital for the little cuckoo, as it needs as much food as all its nestmates put together, if they were to survive.