

Deception and manipulation by cuckoos in the nest

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Cuckoos and cowbirds lay their eggs in nests belonging to other species and so get their young raised for free. In this talk, I consider the behaviour of the young parasite growing up in the nest of a foreign species. How does it exploit the host parents to obtain care? What determines its behaviour towards the other chicks with whom it shares a nest? And can hosts ever resist exploitation by the alien in their nest? Drawing on the results of our field experiments in three continents, I suggest that a parasitic nestling's behaviour might be governed by a trade-off between exploiting the provisioning capacity of their hosts and avoiding recognition.