

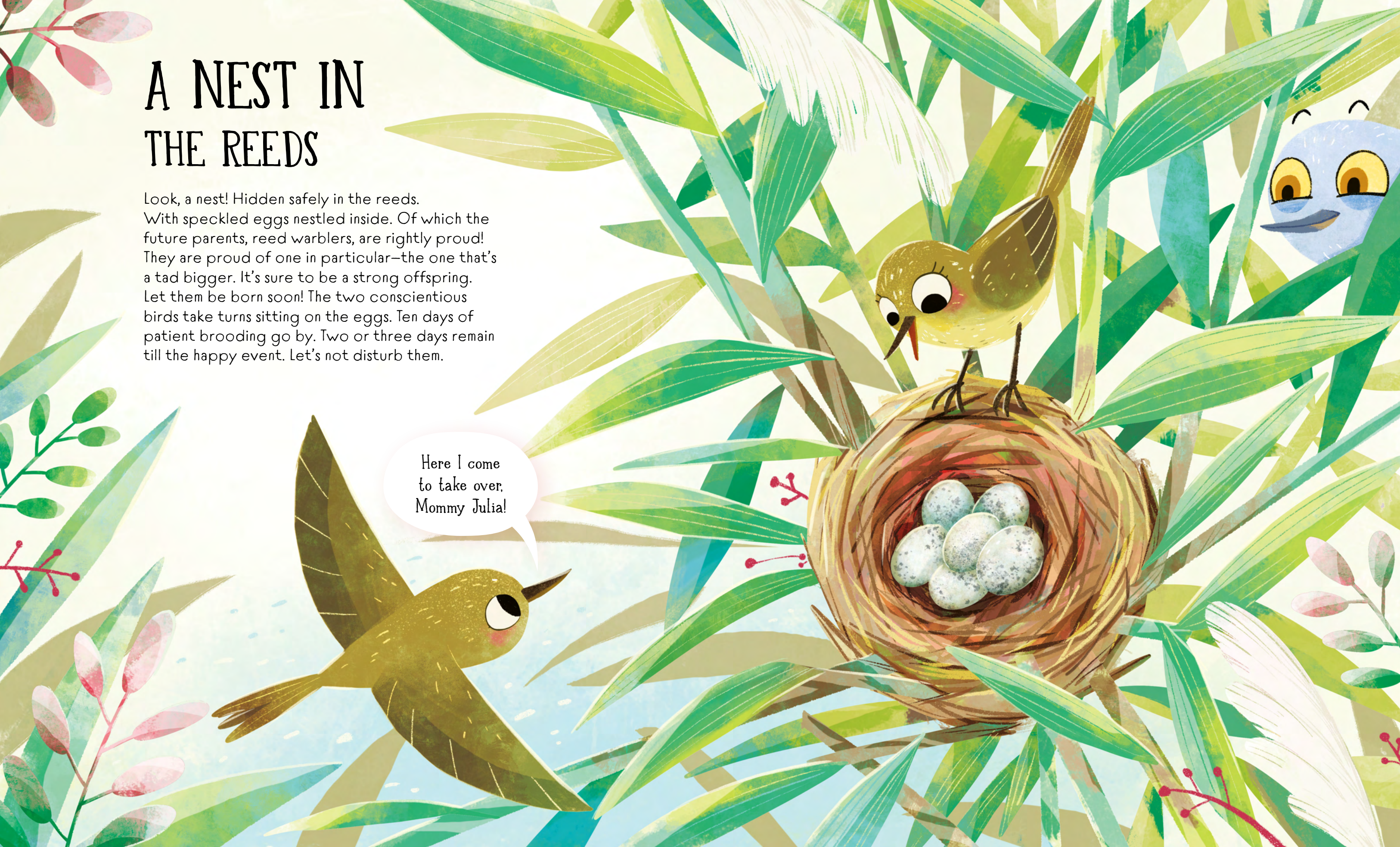
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# WHY THE CUCKOO HAS NO NEST



# A NEST IN THE REEDS

Look, a nest! Hidden safely in the reeds. With speckled eggs nestled inside. Of which the future parents, reed warblers, are rightly proud! They are proud of one in particular—the one that's a tad bigger. It's sure to be a strong offspring. Let them be born soon! The two conscientious birds take turns sitting on the eggs. Ten days of patient brooding go by. Two or three days remain till the happy event. Let's not disturb them.



Here I come  
to take over,  
Mommy Julia!



Out  
you go!

I don't  
want to!

Clever girl!

## ALONE AT LAST

I did it! I'm alone! No more sharing food. No more pushing and shoving. This is just how I want it, even if I don't know why. I hatched with the idea that I'd be an only child! Hey, Mom, it's dinnertime! Feel free to catch me a furry caterpillar—I'd be happy to eat one. Who do I take after? Neither you nor Dad could eat a furry caterpillar ...

## OUT YOU GO!

I get bigger and stronger day by day. Now I'm much too big for the nest. There isn't room for everyone, as you can see. Sorry, brothers and sisters, but you have to go out into the world. I'll help you on your way. One, two, three ... over you go! Petey is on the ground already. Go after him, Mikey and Renie. Have a safe trip! Mom, Dad, where are you ... I need my lunch!

Pull harder!  
It's almost out.

# I HAVE FEATHERS!



Take a good look at me. What do you see? Yes, I have feathers! Not only have I grown too big for our nest, but my parents have to stand on my head to feed me. I'm no baby anymore! Here's how it happened:

## DAYS 1 - 3

When I hatch, I'm bald and blind. Still I'm able to push other eggs out of the nest, with a special groove on my back. My plaintive chirp makes it known that I'm hungry.



## DAYS 4 - 7

I'm still blind and bald, but my body is showing the first hint of feathers. This is called down. My cries ensure that my parents don't let up in their search for my food— and they're getting louder!



## DAYS 13 - 16

Now that my body is covered with feathers, I'm ready to learn how to fly! When I feel threatened, I know to stop crying for food, and to keep completely quiet. As my hunger is insatiable, Mom and Dad have a tough job keeping me fed.



## DAYS 8 - 12

I've grown so fast that I'm bigger than my parents! Real feathers have sprouted on my wings and tail! On the ninth day, I open my eyes to the world at last.

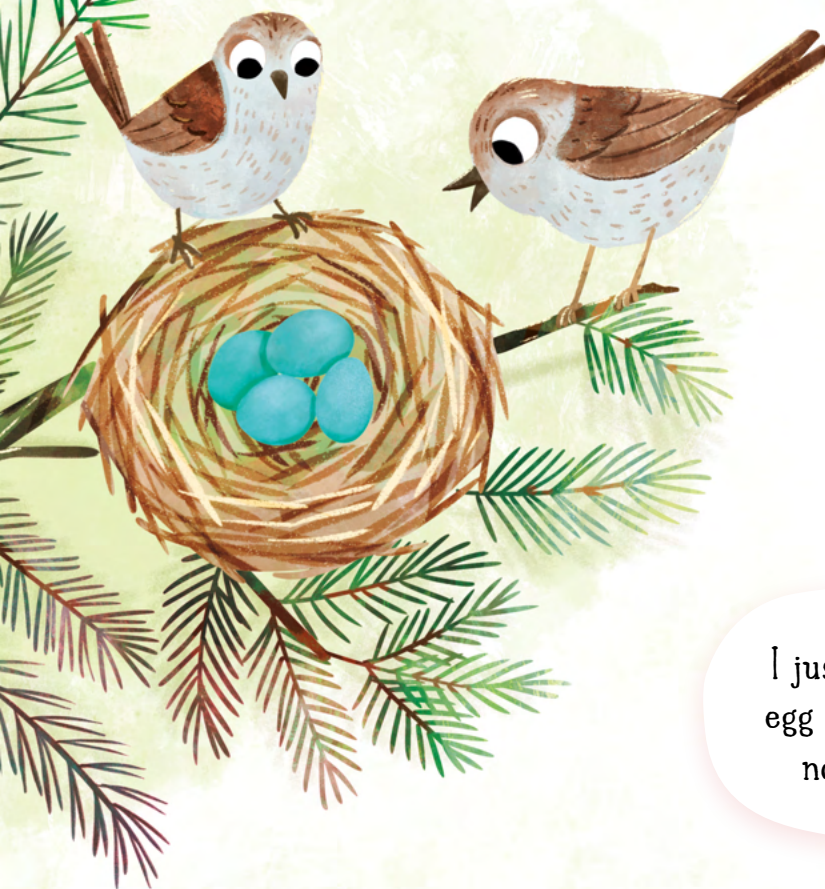


## DAYS 17 - 20

I'm learning to fly! As I try it over and over, sometimes I bump my beak. Learning makes you hungry, I can tell you. Mom? Dad? Where's that snack?

# ADOPTIVE PARENTS

So I am a cuckoo! My mom laid me in a stranger's nest. Most cuckoos do it. But even though my parents are reed warblers, they love me. And they're not the only ones to sometimes find a stranger's egg among their own.



## DUNNOCK

We dunnocks like to build our nests low, in dense shrubbery. When a cuckoo lays blue-green eggs in them, we don't notice a thing, because cuckoos make their eggs a perfect match for ours. We take excellent care of little cuckoos, believe me!

I just hope my egg doesn't get noticed ...



## SKYLARK

Skylarks, too, can occasionally serve as host birds for cuckoos. Though our nests are well hidden, once a cuckoo finds one, it has no trouble getting in. That we spend a lot of time away from our nest suits the cuckoo just fine. We're ideal adoptive parents!



This isn't one of ours!

Oh, sorry. I made a mistake.

## WHITE WAGTAIL

Many wagtails are adoptive parents of young cuckoos. Perhaps it is because our off-white, gray-spotted eggs are easy for cuckoos to mimic, or because our nests are so easy for them to reach. Sometimes we catch a cuckoo in the act. When this happens, we show the egg no mercy.

## BLUE TIT

A cuckoo may sneak its egg into a blue tit's nest. But this can backfire. We blue tits nest in hollows in trees, which are hard for cuckoos to reach. Even if they get their egg in, we may notice it and get rid of it. If the cuckoo egg remains, we're unable to feed the chick properly: We can't provide the large insects it needs for its growth.

I won't try it till they fly away.



# WHERE SHOULD I PUT MY EGG?

It didn't work out with the reed warblers. That super-vigilant pair recognized my egg as different from their own in an instant, and they tossed it out. I'll have to keep looking for someone to entrust my future baby to. Will you help? Now you know the best adoptive parents for little cuckoos, who would you choose?



skylark

blue tit

jay

magpie

crow

bunting

robin

white wagtail

dummock

stork

Clack, clack ...  
I don't think  
cuckoos would like  
it much here.

# I'M ABOUT TO BE A MOM!

Have a great time there, Vitus!

Phew! This time it turned out okay. I left the egg in the nest of other reed warblers. I show loyalty to my chosen foster family—that's the way I am, I take after my mother. Had she given me to a skylark to raise, I'd have chosen a skylark for my little one. Look how well my little Vitus is doing with the reed warblers! I'm so proud of him!

Food!  
I want food!!!

Hold on!  
I'm bringing you a treat.

Isn't that one egg suspiciously large?

You're right.  
It is big!

Keep your claws crossed for me. Cuck-oo.

