



Cambridge Society for the Application of Research

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Brood Parasitism (Getting someone else raise your children)

Dr Claire Spottiswoode
Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge

7.30 p.m., Monday 26th April, 2010
The Wolfson Lecture Theatre, **Churchill College**, Storey's Way, Cambridge

About the Lecture:

Dr Spottiswoode writes:

Brood parasitic birds such as **cuckoos** are cheats that lay their eggs in the nests of other species, and exploit them to pay the costs of raising their young. Host species, in turn, have evolved defences against such cheats, such as rejecting foreign eggs from their nests, which favours parasitic counter-adaptations such as egg mimicry. The two parties can thus become locked in a co-evolutionary struggle each to stay one step ahead of the other, as parasites evolve ever better manipulation of their hosts, and hosts respond with ever more refined defences to evade parasitism.

Co-evolution at its best, however, is to be found in the tropics, where brood parasitism has a more ancient origin and there has been more time for complex interactions to evolve. This talk will focus on new work on co-evolutionary interactions between two little-known African brood parasites, the **Cuckoo Finch** and the **Greater Honeyguide**, and their hosts. Scenes will include multi-coloured eggs, gruesome fratricide, and evolution over a time scale of four million years to within a short human lifetime.

About the speaker

Claire Spottiswoode is a **Royal Society Dorothy Hodgkin Research Fellow** in the Department of Zoology at the University of Cambridge. She comes from Cape Town, South Africa, where she took her first degree before migrating to Cambridge as a PhD student, followed by a Junior Research Fellowship at Sidney Sussex College.

Dr Spottiswoode has been a birdwatcher since the age of seven, and in her research has involved a range of topics in the evolutionary ecology of African birds, including the evolution of sociality, sexual selection, and responses of birds to climate change.

Her main current research interest is co-evolution between brood parasitic birds and their hosts, and she thus spends several months of the year carrying out field experiments in the Zambian bush.

The Organising Secretary adds....

Dr Claire Spottiswoode has just returned from a field trip to Africa; I was delighted to learn that her father was a Member of the CSAR Council when he was studying at Cambridge. How about that? We welcome his daughter, the second Dr Spottiswoode into our midst. It is wonderful to hear that, after several decades, the first Dr Spottiswoode, former Member of our Council, is still actively engaged in research in South Africa.

Best Regards
Richard Freeman
Organising Secretary

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