

the eggs of the host mommy out of the nest and then it hogs all the food that the poor host mommy and daddy birds bring. They keep feeding the imposter cuckoo baby until it's all grown up, thinking it's their own".

"My goodness", I thought, "I wonder if there are cuckoo cats too". I would definitely not allow any cuckoo kittens to eat my food!

Activity suggestions:

Which birds lay their eggs in other birds' nests?

What is a 'wild peach'?

Why do most insects not eat the leaves of a wild peach?

What insect can eat these leaves?



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# THE CUCKOO TREE



BY STRIPES  
THE ECO-CAT

One morning I was feeling frisky and jumped around playing with a butterfly. My humans said it was a Garden Acraea butterfly.

"The larva of this butterfly likes to eat the leaves of the Wild Peach tree. We planted some for Arbour Day", they said.

"Hey, how wild is the peach?" I asked, "Did you have to hold it down to plant it?"

"No silly," my Anina human said. "It's not really wild. It grows naturally in the wild and looks a bit like a peach, so people called it a wild peach."

"The interesting thing about the Wild Peach tree", she continued, "is that it tries to protect itself from being eaten by making cyanide in its leaves. Now cyanide is a very, very poisonous thing. It can even kill cats."

"How clever is that tree", I thought, "but I have no plans to eat it".

"However, the Garden Acraea butterfly is also very clever. It has evolved (that means changed over a very long time) to eat the leaves without

getting killed. It has learned to store the cyanide away safely."

"So now the caterpillar and its butterfly also have cyanide in their bodies and this protects them from being eaten by birds because the birds would die if they did. The butterfly's bright colours warn the birds not to eat it."

She smiled and said, "But there is one bird that has also evolved to be just as clever. Klaas' Cuckoo can also eat cyanide without dying. So this wily Cuckoo can happily feast on Acraea butterflies and their caterpillars".

Just then I heard a bird calling my human. "Nooitjie, Nooitjie!" it called.

"That's the Klaas's Cuckoo" my human said. "You may see it's pretty green feathers if you look carefully". I looked but couldn't spot it at all; it was so well hidden among the branches.

"Did you know, Stripes, that cuckoos use other birds to raise their cuckoo babies? Yes, they lay their eggs in the nest of another bird, called the host. When the baby cuckoo hatches it pushes