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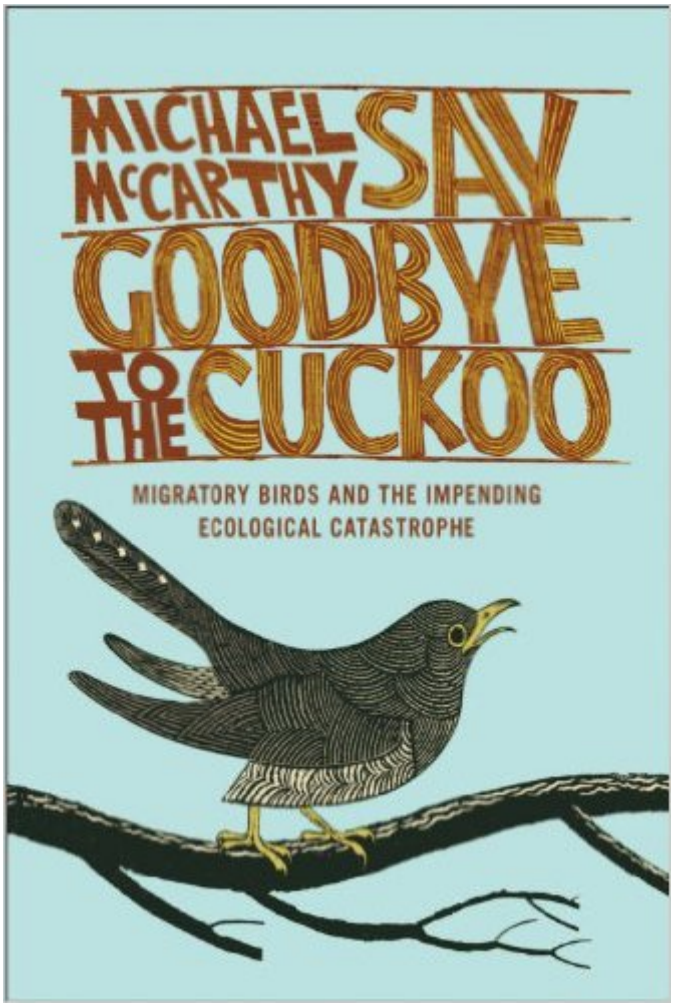
# Say Goodbye To The Cuckoo: Migratory Birds And The Impending Ecological Catastrophe

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## Synopsis

The return of migrant birds from their wintering grounds in the tropics is one of the delights of America’s spring, as anyone will testify whose heart has leapt in April or May at the first liquid song of the woodthrush, or the first black-and-orange flash of the Baltimore oriole. But in recent years concern has grown that migrant birds may be declining, perhaps because of deforestation at their winter quarters in the Caribbean and in Central and South America. Now comes the first evidence that such declines are indeed happening to migrant birds. They pour into the Northern Hemisphere each year in a multi-colored, singing cascade: cuckoos, swallows, martins, swifts, turtle doves, warblers, wagtails, wheatears, chats, nightingales, nightjars, thrushes, pipits, and flycatchers. The vanishing of these Old World birds would be not just an environmental loss but a cultural disaster of enormous magnitude, as many of these species have resonated through literature, legends, and folklore for thousands of years. The turtle dove’s arrival is announced in the Bible’s Song of Solomon; the nightingale sings from Latin poetry to John Keats to a 1940s hit in London’s Berkeley Square; the European cuckoo, with its double note that is a perfect musical interval-a minor third-is the source of proverbs in every country of the continent. In Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo, Michael McCarthy highlights for the first time the disappearance of these birds which, he points out, are a part of Europe’s distinctive cultural furniture, "as much as cathedrals, Latin, olive oil, or wine." He shows how their loss would do devastating damage to the cultural inheritance of us all. With 13 woodcuts.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

My review title is perhaps a clichÃ©, since this book isn't a wake-up call in itself but rather a well-discussed summary of several previous wake-up calls. However, many of these calls never penetrated much further that the scientific literature or newsletters of ornithological societies, and the author does an excellent job of pulling these studies together and describing their findings in a very accessible format such that anyone with a basic knowledge of birds could follow it.The book is mostly concerned with trying to understand the causes and consequences of the sharp declines in bird populations seen in the last few decades (several species have seen their numbers halved in just 13 years, which is startling). The author is British, and so unsurprisingly, most of the examples in the book are British birds. However, this isn't because British birds are the only ones in decline, it's simply that it is a small island with a high density of people interested in birds and willing to help survey them and so the quality of the data showing these declines is almost unparalleled. Many other countries are suffering from the same issues (e.g. deforestation), and so even though this has a very Anglo-centric tone I think anyone would enjoy reading it (and there is a very good chapter devoted to the well documented declines in several North American birds.The book isn't simply a scholastic, dry presentation of statistics and graphs however (though the author has clearly done his homework, and presents many facts and figures to back up his arguments, many of which were new to me).

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