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Birds copy self defence tactics

Scientists at Cambridge University have discovered young birds learn to defend their nests from cuckoos by copying their elders.



Young reed warblers copy their elder's behaviour in attacking cuckoos

Cuckoos remove eggs from reed warbler's nests and replace them with their own, so the unsuspecting warblers raise the young cuckoos.

Some warblers will attack cuckoos on their territory to prevent them laying in their nests.

Research shows young warblers copy this behaviour in social learning.

Scientists said this learning was specific to cuckoos, but not to harmless control birds, such as parrots, suggesting that the warblers are primed to learn defensive behaviour but only in response to true threats.

Dr Justin Welbergen said: "Our previous work showed that reed warblers distinguish cuckoos from other nest enemies and adjust their defences according to local parasitism risk.

"Our current work demonstrates that reed warblers can use social information to fine-tune their defences to the nature of the local threat."



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