



Coucou !

by Sue Burgess

When I was a child we used to recite the rhyme, "The cuckoo comes in April, it sings its song in May, in June it changes its tune, and in July flies away".

In France the cuckoo «*le coucou*» starts to sing at the end of March and so it is quite possible that by the time this month's magazine is out, you may well have heard your first cuckoo of the year.

Cuckoos «*les coucous*» announce the coming of spring «*le printemps*». In some areas of France, local folklore says that if a walker has money in his pocket when he hears the first cuckoo of the year, he will be rich all year long, «*si un promeneur a de l'argent en poche lorsqu'il entend le premier coucou de l'année, il sera riche l'année entière*».

«*A la mi-Mars, le coucou est dans l'épinard.*» In the middle of March the cuckoo is in the lichwort – a medicinal plant that the cuckoo loves because the sticky leaves attract insects which get stuck to them.

Cuckoos have a reputation of not building a nest «*nid*». Some species lay their eggs in other birds' nests and leave the other bird to look after the chicks. So the cuckoo has become the symbol of unfaithfulness «*l'infidélité*» and step-children «*beaux enfants*», children from a previous union «*des enfants d'un autre lit*».

The easily recognisable song of the cuckoo «*COU-cou!*» explains why the bird is so popular. In Luxembourg, on Easter Monday «*lundi de Pâques*», there is the Emaischen Fair «*la foire d'Emaischen*». It is a festival of clay bird whistles «*des sifflets d'oiseau en terre cuite*» which imitate the song of the cuckoo or the nightingale «*le rossignol*». This festival dates back to 1827 and celebrates the end of winter and the return of spring. It was customary to offer the cuckoo whistles to children.

In France «*Coucou!*» has become an interjection used in everyday language to attract someone's attention or say hello «*dire bonjour*». In English you might say "Hi" or "Hey" or even "Cooee". It is also the French equivalent of "Peek-a-Boo".

The cuckoo clocks «*les pendules à coucou*» of the Black Forest have also helped to make this bird popular.

The spring flower, cowslip, (photo right) is known as «*le coucou*» or «*le primevère sauvage*», in French.



«*Un vieux coucou*» is a very old rickety plane.

VOCABULARY / VOCABULAIRE:

le coucou	cuckoo
la plume	feather
le bec	beak
la queue	tail
être maigre comme un coucou....	to be really thin
ce n'est jamais avril si le coucou ne l'a dit	it's not April if you haven't heard the cuckoo
pressé comme un coucou au mois de mai	in a rush like a cuckoo in May
Chant du coucou, temps doux.....	When the cuckoo sings, the weather is mild

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