

Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo by Michael McCarthy.  
John Murray 2009.

The sound made by the male cuckoo not only gives the bird its popular name in English, but for many over a certain age spells the true end of winter and the beginning of spring. I regularly used to hear cuckoos in April in North West London but since moving to the country in 2000 I have not heard one, and I am not alone. The cuckoo's call is increasingly hard to hear in Britain these days, although there are still specific sites where the call and the bird may be encountered, and though the sound itself is not that significant in the scheme of things those who miss it feel its loss most acutely.

Michael McCarthy's book, *Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo*, is a wonderful combination of themes, and although it has its uplifting and joyous moments, as well as being replete with fascinating detail, the underlying tone is dark and sad. *Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo* is a paean to the world of birds, and especially those amazing travellers who migrate north in the spring from sunnier climes to have their offspring in the northern hemisphere.

Any reader of this book will finish it enriched and informed by the contents, as well as concerned by the implications. When the broad statistics and global prognostications concerning climate change are aired in print and we obsess about melting glaciers and rising sea levels it is all too easy to forget the changes that are happening all around us, none more so than with regard to the birds whose magical songs and shining presences enhance so many lives. *Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo* is a reminder of the blessing of birds and the real possibility that what many have taken for granted all their lives, the great harbingers of spring and summer, may soon be a thing of the past.

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