

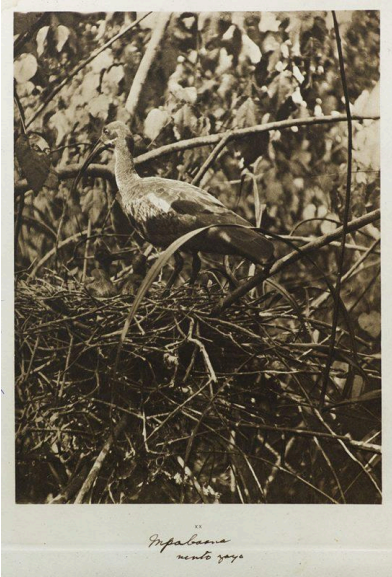
UniquelD: 202103271749

Author: [The Flame Tree and Other Folklore Stories from Uganda](#)

Title: Rosetta Baskerville

Published: 1900

Internet Archive: [Always Available.](#)



([birds of Uganda: mpabana](#))

The African cuckoo does not sing Cuckoo, Cuckoo ; it sings Cuckookoo, Cuckookoo, and it can sing this song for a whole hour, until everyone in the neighbourhood is tired of hearing it; then it flies to another tree, clears its throat and begins again.

The mother cuckoo is too lazy to build a nest of her own, and to hatch her own eggs. If she finds a nice comfortable-looking nest she lays an egg in it and flies away hoping the owner will hatch it for her, but she forgets so soon that she never returns to see what has happened to her egg.

One day a mother cuckoo found a lovely nest in the forest and laid an egg among the four little eggs which were in it already. Then she flew away and forgot all about it. When the owner of the nest returned, she was too tender-hearted to throw the egg out, so she hatched it with her own. But the young cuckoo was so large and hungry that he soon filled up the nest, and one day when the mother bird was away looking for food he pushed the four little fledglings out of the nest. A wild cat was passing among the bushes down below and gobbled them up as they fell.

When the mother bird returned she found only the cuckoo in her nest, and she searched everywhere for her children crying as she went, "Mpa bana, mpa bana," which means, "Give me children, give me children." She searched under the bushes and all round her nest and then went all through the forest crying all the time, "Mpa bana, mpa bana" till all the other birds and animals knew of her sorrow.

When the next nesting season came, she laid four more eggs and never left the young birds after they were hatched, but she had got into the habit of singing this song:

I left them safe in the nest,
Mpa bana, mpa bana;
Seeking the food that was best,
Mpa bana, mpa bana;
How did the cruel thief come,

Mpa bana, mpa bana;
Wrecking my joy and my home,
Mpa bana, mpa bana.

The young birds heard it all day long and learnt to sing it, and now it has become their tribal song, and they sing it for hours together, and are quite as tiresome as the cuckoo who just sings cuckookoo, cuckookoo, without grumbling about it.