



## There's a cuckoo in the nest: a deceptive bird

*In human societies man is his own parasite, a circumstance which seems to ensure that all civilised societies shall be fully infested.*

SIR RONALD FISHER<sup>1</sup>

Product advertising owes much to the patent medicine salesmen around the time of the American Civil War (1861–65). Promoters of elixirs such as Coca-Cola — first produced in Atlanta in 1886 — promised instant gratification and an eager population accepted the promise. A few remote tribes have not yet experienced the barrage of Coca-Cola advertising, but for the rest of us Coca-colonisation is well established. Even our jolly Santa Claus, dressed in red and white, is a creation of a Coca-Cola artist. Images, labels and brands define our cultural reality and advertisers tell us what to think (but not to think too much).

Artificial pet food producers were quick to mimic the tone and style of the patent medicine men. Stopping short of breaching advertising codes, but at the same time making unsubstantiated health claims, the companies found a sure way to extract cash from wallets. 'Trust us, we are the experts', the ads seem to say.

And from an early stage some experts willingly participated in the promotions — for a fee. American veterinarian Dr A C Daniels, around 1910, endorsed 'Medicated Dog Bread' which he proclaimed did not contain 'cheapening ingredients such as talc powder and mill sweepings' but was made with only 'the best winter wheat, rice meal and fresh meat'. Rival products, Daniels warned, might result in 'constipation,