Cuckoo's a Bonny Bird

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1.
The cuckoo's a bonny bird,
He sings as he flies;
He brings us good tidings,
He tells us no lies.

He drinks the cold water,
To keep his voice clear;
And he'll come again
In the spring of the year.

2.
The Gowk-coo's a bonny bird,
He sings when he flies,
He brings us good tidings,
And he tells us no lies;
He sucks little birds eggs
To make his voice clear,
And he never cries gowk-coo
Till the summer draws near.

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(1) Chambers PRS (1847), 164; (1870), 193; Cheviot (1896), 320; Montgomerie SNR 20 (no. 5).
See ODNR 139 (no. 121); earliest ref. is 1796. Chambers' 1842 ed. has 1.1 fine 2.3-4 And when he sings cuckoo!/ The summer is near. Also cf. FSJ 1907, 1918, etc. etc.

(2) Paul Past & Present of Aberdeenshire (1881), 152 (no. 17).
A good American text in Carrie B. Grover, A Heritage of Songs (n.d.), 40, with music; words also in Duncan Emrich, American Folk Poetry (Little, Brown, 1974), 118: The cuckoo is a bonny bird, She sings as she flies, She brings us glad tidings, She tells us no lies. She sips the sweet flowers, To make her voice clear, And she always sings "Cuck-oo" When summer is near (4 stanzas). A floater, it turns up in a Missouri version of "The Unconstant Lover" (Belden, 1955 [repr. 1966], 476):

Oh, the cuckoo is a pretty bird, he sings as he flies,
He brings us glad tidings and tells us no lies,

He feeds on young birds to make him sing clear,
And when he sings `Cuckoo!' the summer draws near.

English versions: see "The Cuckoo" (Reeves Everlasting Circle [1960], 79 [no. 25]) - two with this stanza, line 3 sucking "sweet flowers", line 4 the summer draws near (coll. Baring-Gould, Hammond). Cf. also in Sharp, English County Folk Songs (1908; 1961), 24-5; etc.

MS

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