

I hate to see reality impinge on the colorful world of conspiracy theories\227but here it is. DARPA, the Research & Development branch of the US Department of Defense, is working on a robot hummingbird that flies and looks like the lively little bird itself\227but is intended to spy on human activities. It is not yet ready to deploy, but it reminds me that the Pentagon is not the only institution thinking about such things. Nor are such inventions only used in warfare. They could also have civilian applications such as finding bodies buried under earthquake rubble.

An Israeli scientist has discovered that mice are sensitive to certain smells\227particularly explosives. The Israelis will use this system to detect suicide bombers as they walk through security sensors. The mice, in a container, smell the explosives and run away, setting off an alarm. The mice do not have to be \223trained.
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They are biosensors by nature.

Animals, such as dogs and geese, have always been first-alert protectors for man. But using animals as spies is a new idea indeed. Unlike the hummingbird robot and detector mice, conspiracy theories about animal spies have no relationship with reality but come from fevered minds in the Middle East\227a region always rife for conspiracy theories. The problem with the conspiracy theories is their absence of scientific logic.

This from the Huffington Post (January 15, 2011): \223A vulture was \221arrested\222 in Saudi Arabia, accused of being a spy for Mossad, Israel\222s intelligence agency. While it may seem like an unusual occurrence, this vulture is just one of many creatures that have been accused of spying. From insects to squirrels, animals have been accused of various forms of espionage over the years. As technology continues to develop, it seems that this trend may escalate.\223

The Saudis really must think the Israelis are clever enough to train vultures to spy for them. They found \223proof\224 in the vulture\222s resistance to being caught. It squawked loudly and spit out foul-smelling substances from its mouth. (Do they know what vultures eat?)
What is behind this Saudi paranoia is failure to understand western science. The Israelis have indeed been putting GPS tags on various wildlife to track their movements and to ascertain their health and wellbeing. This is ordinary modern science that seems to have been missed in the Saudi school system. That poor vulture is probably still being held.
Sudan does not understand such species research either. They captured a pelican wearing a GPS tag marked \223Tel Aviv University\224 and assumed the worst.

The Palestinians, no slouches at conspiracy, claimed the Israelis released large poison-resistant rats in Jerusalem to frighten away Palestinians living there. Presumably, Jews living there are not afraid of such rats. They also claim that Jews have released wild boars to destroy Palestinian crops, but clever enough to spare Israeli crops. Wild boars are clever, but how can they tell whose crop it is?
Egypt recently accused Israel of sending a \223Mossad\224 killer shark to plague Egyptian beaches. Nobody asks how that shark can tell an Egyptian from an Israeli, but then, this could make a good horror movie.
Iranians are always eager to detect conspiracies too. It is a national sport. In 2007, 14 squirrels were jailed because, said the Iranians, the squirrels were fitted with eavesdropping equipment. I would love to know a trainer who could get such squirrels\222 cooperation! I can also imagine the jokes that Iranians make about this in private.

Iran also claimed to find a \223spy pigeon\224 near one of their nuclear facilities. Pigeons have long been used to carry messages in wartime. But those would have to be very long-distance fliers, super pigeons, to convey such secrets.
It is bad enough to have ridiculous conspiracy theories to deal with, but when our own Defense Department (and others as well) talk about using animals, sea creatures, birds, and insects to use in war as spies, we feed the conspiracy machine, which is already too well fed. But then, it does not take much for the paranoid to cook up a conspiracy theory.

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