

Animal Espionage, 5 Crazy Case Studies

As crazy as it sounds, some of the CIA's best and brightest weren't even human. Notoriously, the United States government has used animals as real-life spies throughout the years. The Smithsonian notes that several types of birds, aquatic life, and even cats have been used for espionage over the years!

Recently, many news outlets reported that fishermen off the northern coast of Norway caught sight of a beluga whale outfitted with a harness. Eventually, it was discovered that this whale was a trained asset for Russia and that the harness was capable of being equipped with a camera.

Like the U.S., Russia has used animals as spies in the past. Their recent program with beluga whales traces its roots back to the Cold War. Israel, Germany, and England are also often accused of using animal intelligence agents.

1. Mind Controlled Shark

Back in the early 2000s, the United States' spy agencies implored the military to create a chip that could be implanted in the brain of a shark. They hoped to be able to use the chip to steer the shark undetected through the water. They also wanted to use the sharks as undersea spies that would be able to track foreign vessels without being noticed.

Although the shark program never really took off, the U.S. uses sea lions to find lost objects and unarmed mines. Surprisingly, sea lions can find a mine faster than sonar detection can!

2. Pigeon, Bird of War

Pigeons are famous for their exploits of carrying messages during times of war, most notably, WWI and WWII. It is believed that more than 100,000 pigeons were used during WWI and that they had a success rate of more than 95% when carrying messages. They are credited with not only saving lives, but also winning battles.

Some people have had pretty wild ideas about ways pigeons could be used for intelligence gathering. In the mid 20th century, B.F. Skinner wanted to put devices on pigeons and use them to guide missiles.

Skinner's plan didn't work out, but, later on, pigeons were trained to drop recording equipment near opposing troops. They provided plenty of useful intelligence for U.S. troops, and prevented their ambush more than 45 times.

3. CIA Cats

During the Cold War, the CIA got into some pretty strange stuff in their attempts to out-do the Soviets in the international game of espionage. Since the Soviets were using animal agents, of course, so was the United States.

The CIA came up with a plan to surgically implant transmitters in the cat's ear and ribcage to use the cat as a transmitter. They were hoping to send recordings taken at the Soviet embassies by way of the cats.

The cats themselves thwarted this plan. True to their nature, as any cat owner will tell you, cats go where they want and do what they want. The CIA abandoned the project because they were unable to find a way to train the cats or control the direction in which they would go.

4. Squirrels of the Mossad

The Iranian military accused 14 squirrels of illegally crossing their border to spy on the country's nuclear activity. The Iranian government accused Israeli intelligence of equipping the little creatures with cameras and tracking devices.

It's unclear what became of the squirrels, but the Israeli government denies any involvement in the situation. Wildlife experts say it is unlikely that squirrels could carry out such an operation.

The Iranian military is generally suspicious of Israel's use of and involvement with animal spies. In the past, they have accused lizards, dolphins, and even cats of being spies as well.

5. The Chameleon, the Ultimate Undercover Agent

Naturally well suited for espionage due to their natural ability to camouflage, a chameleon was also accused by the Iranian government of spying. Like the squirrels, they said that chameleons had been sent by western governments along with Israel to spy on their nuclear operations.

The Iranian secret intelligence believed the chameleons could find uranium mines, using the theory that atomic waves were attracted to their skin. According to scientists, there is no truth to such claims.

Some stories of animal spies are entirely true, while others, like the chameleons, are pretty outrageous. After reading this, you may wonder about the new stray cat in the neighborhood, or even make you take a second look at your own pet.