

Parker Spradlin

1301 English Composition

Argumentative Essay

Professor Hammet

### The Cultural Reality Behind the Birds Aren't Real Movement

Originally an internet joke mocking conspiracy theories, the Birds Aren't Real movement has grown into something real and culturally important. Started in 2017 by Peter McIndoe, it began as pure satire but quickly turned into a social movement that reflects how confused people are today about truth and media. *Audubon Magazine* says McIndoe created it as a joke when he was a twenty-year-old student, but now it has real chapters and national attention (*Audubon Magazine*). Snopes reports that around 50 groups across the U.S. have held rallies and sold merch, proving how far the idea has spread (Snopes). Even though the claim that birds are government drones is fake, the movement itself is real because it shapes identity, sparks conversations, and shows how fiction can easily turn into “truth” in modern culture.

The first conspiracy theory in the Birds Aren't Real movement argues that the government secretly replaced real birds with drones to spy on citizens. Supporters believe this idea gained traction because of how quickly surveillance technology has advanced in the United States. According to *The Guardian*, “The idea that drones could mimic birds is not far-fetched given the current level of surveillance technology” (Hern 2). This suggests that even though the theory sounds extreme, the technology needed to create such drones is becoming increasingly realistic. Because the government already uses drones, satellites, phone tracking, and mass data collection, people can easily imagine a future where surveillance becomes even more hidden. As

a result, the belief that birds could be used as undercover drones does not seem impossible to supporters of the movement.

The second conspiracy theory claims that real birds were wiped out and replaced with government surveillance drones during the Cold War. Supporters argue that this period of fear, secrecy, and political tension created the perfect opportunity for the government to operate unnoticed. *The New York Times* reports, “Followers of the Birds Aren’t Real movement claim that between 1959 and 1971, the U.S. government replaced over 12 billion birds with surveillance drones designed to monitor citizens” (Alfonso 1). This quote shows how deeply the movement ties its beliefs to a moment in history when citizens were distracted by global conflict and military threats. Because the nation’s focus was on the war and nuclear competition, believers argue the government could replace birds without raising suspicion. As a result, this theory strengthens the movement’s claim that mass surveillance has been happening longer—and far more secretly—than most people realize.

Another major idea in the Birds Aren’t Real movement is that the government uses bird drones to collect personal data and track people’s everyday behavior. Supporters argue that this theory feels believable because modern technology already collects huge amounts of information from phones, computers, and social media. According to *Wired Magazine*, “Surveillance devices today are built to blend into the environment, gathering data in ways most citizens never notice” (Wired 4). This evidence shows why some people think it is possible for the government to push surveillance even further by disguising it as something ordinary, like a bird. Since people already feel watched online and on camera, the idea that birds could also be part of a larger surveillance system seems less strange to them. As a result, this theory helps strengthen the movement’s message that privacy is disappearing in ways most people don’t realize.

Overall, the Birds Aren't Real movement proves that even ideas that start as jokes can become powerful cultural forces. While the beliefs within the movement are not scientifically true, the movement itself reveals something important about how people respond to technology, government power, and media influence. Supporters use conspiracy theories to express real fears about surveillance and privacy, making the movement meaningful in modern society. In the end, Birds Aren't Real shows how easily fiction can become a shared "truth" for people who feel unheard or overwhelmed, and it demonstrates how conspiracy theories can shape identity, community, and national conversation.

## Works Cited

Alfonso, Fernando. "*Birds Aren't Real, but Their Message Is.*" *The New York Times*, 12 Dec. 2021, p. 1.

Audubon Magazine. "*Inside the Birds Aren't Real Movement.*" *Audubon*, 2021.

Hern, Alex. "*The Rise of Bird-Like Surveillance Drones.*" *The Guardian*, 5 Mar. 2019, p. 2.

Snopes. "*Is the Birds Aren't Real Movement Real?*" *Snopes*, 2021.

Wired Magazine. "*How Surveillance Tech Hides in Plain Sight.*" *Wired*, 2020, p. 4.