

join the fight!



stoplapdspying.org
watchthewatchers.net
stoplapdspying@gmail.com

@stoplapdspying



birdwatching in los angeles:

a brief backyard guide &
connections to policing



field notes

field notes

intro

This zine was designed for Stop LAPD Spying's monthly Youth Day at the Park events as an interactive activity inviting youth and community members to birdwatch and document their observations. The zine is a political education tool for youth and adults alike, considering how everyday activities such as birdwatching can be sites for deepening our understandings of policing and resistance.

Each explainer section of the zine is divided into content for adults and content for youth, laid out side by side to clearly delineate our "translations" of these concepts and history. We understand that youth may have varied familiarity with the content in this zine, so please feel free to use our language as an entrypoint and adapt it for the young people in your life!

policing of birdwatching (for reading adults!)

Background

Policing programs target youth—especially Black, Muslim, indigenous, disabled, queer, and undocumented youth—as national security threats under the framework of **behavioral surveillance**. Behavioral surveillance is a racist pretext for expanding the reach of policing, claiming that human behavior can mechanically reveal and predict who will commit crimes in the future.

Implementation in Los Angeles

Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) adopted the national **Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR)** program in 2008 and disseminated the **WATCH app** to encourage community members to

- 1) identify “observed behaviors” that indicate planning for terrorism or crime and
- 2) report these instances to straight to police

One of the reportable behaviors included **using binoculars**, a common practice for birdwatching. Others included political or religious displays in residences and unusual smells.

Harms of Behavioral Surveillance

Suspicious activity reports are retained indefinitely within databases that are shared with other agencies such as federal spy hubs. LAPD, ICE, and other agencies may have access to these reports and even stalk those reported, putting them in the crosshairs of incarceration and deportation.

LAPD’s own audit revealed that behavioral surveillance was another mechanism for racial profiling. Black people were overwhelmingly reported as suspicious, and reports came from white-majority neighborhoods.

field notes

field notes

policing of birdwatching (for youth!)

Background

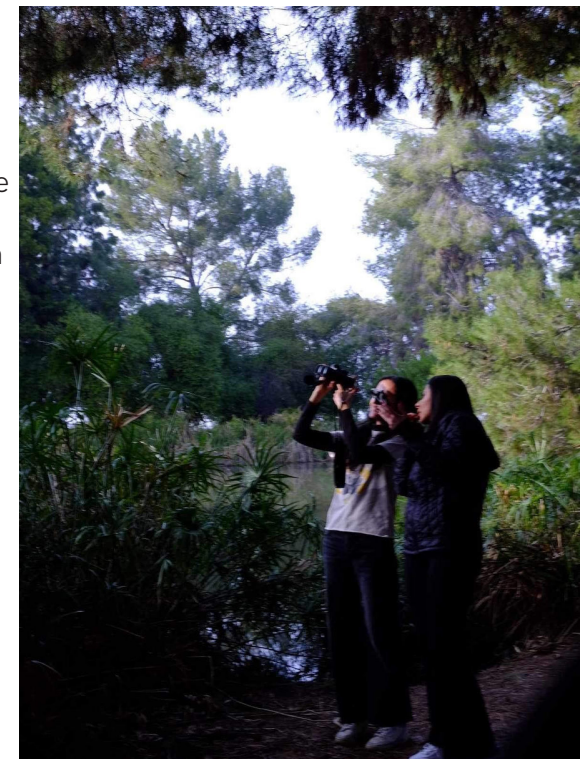
- **Behavioral surveillance** is an idea that police use to increase their control. The idea is that by watching what people do, we can guess who will do harmful things.

How did they do this in Los Angeles?

- Los Angeles's police encouraged you to look for other people doing things such as using binoculars, having political signs in their homes, or smelling weird.
- This includes people who were **using binoculars** to birdwatch!
- Police said that you should be distrustful and watchful of people doing these things, and you should report these people to the police.

Why is that harmful?

- After police get these reports, they can share the reports with other organizations. This puts the people who were reported at risk for more contact with police, prisons, and immigration officers.
- Police looked at their own reports and found that they were racist. Reports mostly came from white people who were reporting Black people to the police.



watching: a tool to fight back (for reading adults!)

From Birdwatching to Copwatching

Birdwatching is a practice of close observation. The details of our feathered friends' color palettes and calls ask us to pause and see life around us with more vibrancy and wonder. We can cultivate those principles into many other parts of our lives that may demand the same curiosity and presence, as a defense against the racial capitalist order that thrives off apathy to relationships with the land and its inhabitants.

Another tool of close observation is copwatching. Copwatch refers to the practice of community members teaming up to observe and document police abuses, especially arrests and other violence. Black Panthers and Brown Berets organized community patrols to document and intervene on police brutality.

Watch the Watchers

Stop LAPD Spying has also been employing a copwatch practice called Watch the Watchers for over a decade. Watch the Watchers extends copwatching with a focus on surveillance technologies and tactics. At our annual May Day actions, we have exposed LAPD's undercover surveillance at MacArthur Park in 2015 and spy technologies used to monitor the crowd in 2017.

The lineage of copwatching as a counter-surveillance practice invokes a form of self-defense against the state's sanctioned asymmetrical violence and access to information about us. Anyone can copwatch!

watchthewatchers.net

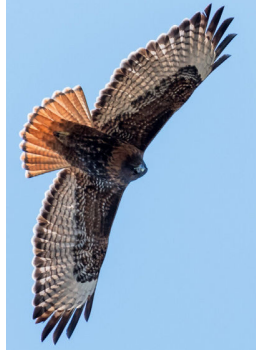
Use this database developed by Stop LAPD Spying to identify LAPD police officers and learn more about our copwatching practice!

big

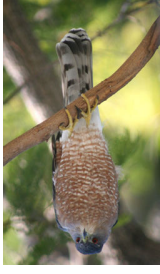
☐ Common Raven



☐ Red-tailed Hawk



☐ Cooper's Hawk



medium-big

☐ American Crow



☐ Feral Pigeon



☐ Mourning Dove



☐ Eurasian Collared Dove



watching: a tool to fight back (for youth!)

From Birdwatching to Copwatching

- **Birdwatching** is an activity of looking closely at the world. It encourages us to slow down so we can notice birds around us, be curious, and have deeper relationships to the land and its creatures.
- Copwatching is another activity that requires us to look closely. **Copwatch** is when people come together in groups, watch, and take note of harm the police are doing, such as arrests and violence.
- It started from the **Black Panthers and Brown Berets** who created community patrols to take note of and stop police violence.

Watch the Watchers

- **Stop LAPD Spying** has also been using our form of copwatching for many years. Our copwatch, called **Watch the Watchers**, also includes the gear and ways that police are constantly keeping an eye on us.
- In the past, we have used copwatching to show when police were lying about secretly watching us during community events.
- This is one way that community members can protect each other.



Berkeley Copwatch, 1990

small



☐ Allen's Hummingbird



☐ Anna's Hummingbird



☐ Bushtit



☐ Rufous Hummingbird



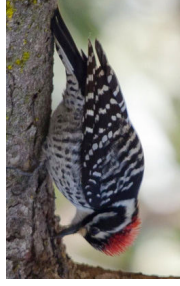
☐ Western Bluebird



☐ American Robin



☐ Northern Mockingbird



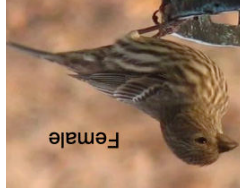
☐ Nuttall's Woodpecker



☐ American Goldfinch



☐ Lesser Goldfinch



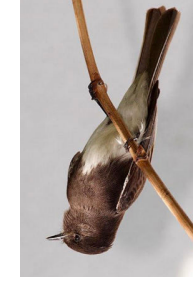
☐ House Finch



☐ House Sparrow



☐ European Starling



☐ Black Phoebe

medium