

Flap over parrots is serious business

Legalization would cause big trouble

By [Glenn Normandeau](#) / [For the Monitor](#)

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The news media has been aflutter with stories about the illegal parrots owned by some Granite State residents. Beyond the irresistible draw of journalists to puns and people to pets, the issue could have a serious impact on New Hampshire.

The birds in question are monk parakeets, also known as Quaker parrots. They are South American birds that have been banned in New Hampshire since 1998. Possession or importation is illegal. Even Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus may not bring them into the state to display.

These "parakeets" are not small birds - they're about a foot tall. They nest in colonies of up to 20 pairs of birds occupying a nest, which can range in size from a couple of feet in diameter to 10 or more feet. These nests are generally built on manmade structures such as electrical transformers and cell phone towers. In some states, Quaker parrot colonies have caused costly, dangerous power outages and fires, as well as problems with the transmission of electricity. These damages are a risk to the health and safety of utility workers - and the dollar costs are ultimately borne by ratepayers.

If monk parakeets were to become established in the "wild" in New Hampshire, as they have in Chicago and New York, we could count on similar problems here.

As often happens with invasive species, no one saw it coming. From 1968 to 1972, some 64,225 monk parakeets were imported into the United States by the pet trade. Agricultural interests soon realized that the species was a potential agricultural pest, and the bird became the focus of an eradication program by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in the 1970s. Since that time, the numbers of monk parakeets have recovered and the species has exhibited a dramatic population expansion to levels far above the pre-control numbers. Though South American birds, they are well able to adapt to northern climates.

Monk parakeets have established feral populations in 18 states, including New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts. Significant damage has occurred in states like Connecticut, where large colonies of monk parakeets have taken up residence in several

communities. Based on their experience, Connecticut wildlife and utility officials strongly advised the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department to make every effort to prevent the establishment of a population of the bird here.

New Hampshire Fish and Game is the state agency charged with managing the state's fish, wildlife and marine resources on behalf of New Hampshire's citizens, and it is our duty to uphold the law. Conservation officers and other Fish and Game staff care deeply about New Hampshire's wildlife.

We need to be serious and objective about enforcing invasive species laws, because the people of New Hampshire can't afford and wouldn't tolerate the consequences of not doing so.

(Glenn Normandeau is executive director of the state Fish and Game Department.)