

For local enthusiast Quaker parrot ban is for the birds

By VICTORIA GUAY / Laconia Citizen

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Birdowners across the state, including the Lakes Region, are putting their support behind a Nashua woman who has been ordered by the state to get rid of the almost 20 Quaker parrots she has owned and bred for years, after she contacted the Fish and Game Department about what she describes as an obscure law banning the birds.

Suzanne Burke, of Nashua is on a mission to repeal a law that prohibits anyone in the state from transporting, owning, selling or breeding Quaker parrots, also known as monk parakeets.

Burke only recently learned of the law Fish and Game officials say has been on the books since 1998. When she did learn about it, she contacted Fish and Game herself to find out if it was true.

In response a Fish and Game officer visited Burke's home on Sunday, Jan, 30 and gave her 30 days to get rid of the birds or face being taken into court and fines of up to \$1,000.

Burke said she is particularly disappointed because she contacted the Fish and Game Department herself.

"I wasn't trying to hide anything," Burke said, adding that she had hoped Fish and Game would grant her reprieve on the 30 day requirement.

"But they are pretty adamant that the birds have to go," Burke said.

She said the fact that so few people know anything about the law and that the Fish and Game Department has not seemed to enforce it over the years should be taken into consideration going forward.

"It's been unenforceable for 13 years, it's as good as dead to me," Burke said of the law.

Dave Smith of Northfield, a member of the "Birds of a Feather" bird club, a statewide group that Burke belongs to, said he agrees that the law should be repealed.

Smith does not own monk parakeets but he sympathizes with Suzanne Burke's plight.



These tiny birds have caused quite a controversy after a Nashua woman, Suzanne Burke, found out the Quaker parrots she had raised and hobby-bred for years are illegal to own in New Hampshire. Burke, who provided this photos of two of her birds, said she had no idea such a law existed.

He said he had never heard of the law until Burke spoke to him about the situation.

He said since Burke's story came out, he has been contacted by several monk parakeet owners and one pet store. "The state should have notified pet stores and veterinarians when the law came out," Smith said.

Smith said the monk parakeet is invasive only in large, wild flocks, a situation he doesn't see happening in New Hampshire.

He said since most of them are owned as indoors pets, many would have their wing clipped so that they could not fly away if they got out their cages.

"Whether one should survive if got loose ... the odds are it isn't going to live," Smith said. "They are not the nasty birds people say they are."

He added that Quaker parrots are legal to own in Massachusetts, Maine and Vermont.

The birds were made illegal in New Hampshire after incidents in Connecticut and New York state where large flocks of the parrots were found in the wild and building large nests on power lines.

The birds were only recently made legal to own Massachusetts.

According to the state's exotic animal law, (RSA 207:14), the Quaker parrot or monk parakeet, which hails from Brazil, is the only species of bird that is illegal for anyone to own in the state, because they are considered an invasive species.

Other exotic animals that are completely prohibited by state law are zebra mussels, all nonindigenous crayfish, walking catfish, white carp, European rudd and round goby.

There are other exotic species of animals that are legal to only by permit, and many are allowed only to trained exhibitors.

Lt. Robert Bryant of New Hampshire Fish and Game said those who are found to have Quaker parrots are told they have get rid of the birds or the state with seize them. The violator can also face court time and up a \$1,000 fine.

In terms of enforcement, Bryant said they would not visit a home unless they had information that the homeowner was keeping Quaker parrots.

However, he said they will be inspecting pet stores more frequently.

Burke said she wants the Fish and Game Department to show her proof, if there is any, of Quaker parrots ever creating a nuisance in New Hampshire. She added that she is also trying to find out if anyone in the state has been cited for having the birds, apart from herself.

While she admitted that feral colonies of Quaker parrots have caused issues by building large nests on power lines, there has never been such a problem in New Hampshire.

She added that New Hampshire's climate would not be conducive to large numbers the birds surviving from year to year in the wild.

Smith said they are hard to get rid of and are quite common, though expensive costing between \$500 to \$800.

The bird club Smith belongs to estimates there could be upward of 600 monk parrakeets in the state.

Burke agreed that finding new homes for the birds will not be easy.

They will also be personal and financial loss.

"These are my pets and I've invested a lot in these birds," Burke said.

She estimates that all her birds, which number less than 20, are worth between \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Smith said for the most part, people own one or two monk parrakeets as pets, with some people, like Burke doing a little hobby breeding.

He said those own birds as pets, especially expensive ones, work to prevent escape.

"We love our birds to death," Smith said. "And we are very responsible."

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