

Parrots must go, state tells woman

◆ **Birds banned:** If a new home is not found outside New Hampshire, the birds could be euthanized.

By **PAUL FEELY**
New Hampshire Union Leader

NASHUA — Looking at Suzanne Burke's Nashua home, no one would ever guess she was harboring nearly 20 illegal residents in cages.

But that's just what she and her

husband were told last Sunday by New Hampshire Fish and Game Field Officer Geoff Pushee. He was referring to the couple's many Quaker parrots, also known as Monk parakeets, a species that's been illegal to own in New Hampshire since 1998.

A longtime bird enthusiast,

Burke said the fact that her pets were considered an invasive species and could be seized or even euthanized by the state came as a shock.

"I'm in a bird club here. I know stores that sell them. No one I've talked to had any idea that these birds are illegal," said Burke. "Now I have 30 days to find a new home for them, or they will be seized by

► See **Parrots**, Page A16

"No one I've talked to had any idea that these birds are illegal. Now I have 30 days to find a new home for them."

SUZANNE BURKE

Page A16 • NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER • Thursday, Feb. 3, 2011

Parrots

the state."

She added: "These are our pets. I don't want to give them up."

Fish and Game Lt. Robert Bryant said the department is surprised that people in the pet bird community are not aware of the rule.

"We realize they are pets, but the fact is they are an invasive species," he said, noting the department will make every effort to find a home for the birds.

"We don't want to euthanize them, but that is an option," he said. "But I find it hard to believe that we, or the owners, couldn't find someone somewhere else to take them in ... We have every right to get a warrant and seize the animals, and the individual possessing it could be subject to a summons to court for each count of possession."

A phone call, a visit

Burke says the trouble started when a member of her club, Birds of a Feather, told her that it was illegal to own Monk parakeets, known more commonly among aviary enthusiasts as Quaker parrots, in New Hamp-

Outlawed species

Invertebrates: Zebra mussel; spiny waterflea; fishhook waterflea; all non-indigenous crayfish; and Asiatic clam.

Fish: Walking catfish; white amur/grass carp; black carp; European rudd; round goby; tubenose goby; ruffe; snakeheads.

Birds: Monk parakeet.

Source: New Hampshire Fish and Game

shire. After searching online, she called the Fish and Game offices.

"I was up front with them, and was told that I had to get rid of them," said Burke. "Then Sunday at 9:30, an officer is at our door, telling my husband that, because I called, they identified us as an owner of these birds, and I have 30 days to relocate them, or they will seize them. I don't think this law has ever been enforced before, and I'm not sure why this is priority number-one here now."

Parting with their feathered friends isn't an easy task for

Burke or others, who says some of her birds are worth \$2,000 and estimates that she has more than \$8,000 invested in them.

Imported as pets

Monk parakeets or Quaker parrots (*Myiopsitta monachus*) are native to South America, hailing from central Bolivia and southern Brazil, Uruguay, and southern and central Argentina. Tens of thousands have been imported to the United States for sale as pets.

Their presence as a potential invasive species began to draw attention in the early 1960s, when escaped and released birds started breeding in Florida, Connecticut, New York, and California.

They are outlawed in some of these states, with Connecticut citing the fact they typically build nests on power lines and utility poles (causing fires and power outages) as a main reason. They have also been known to cause damage to farming crops.

Still being sold

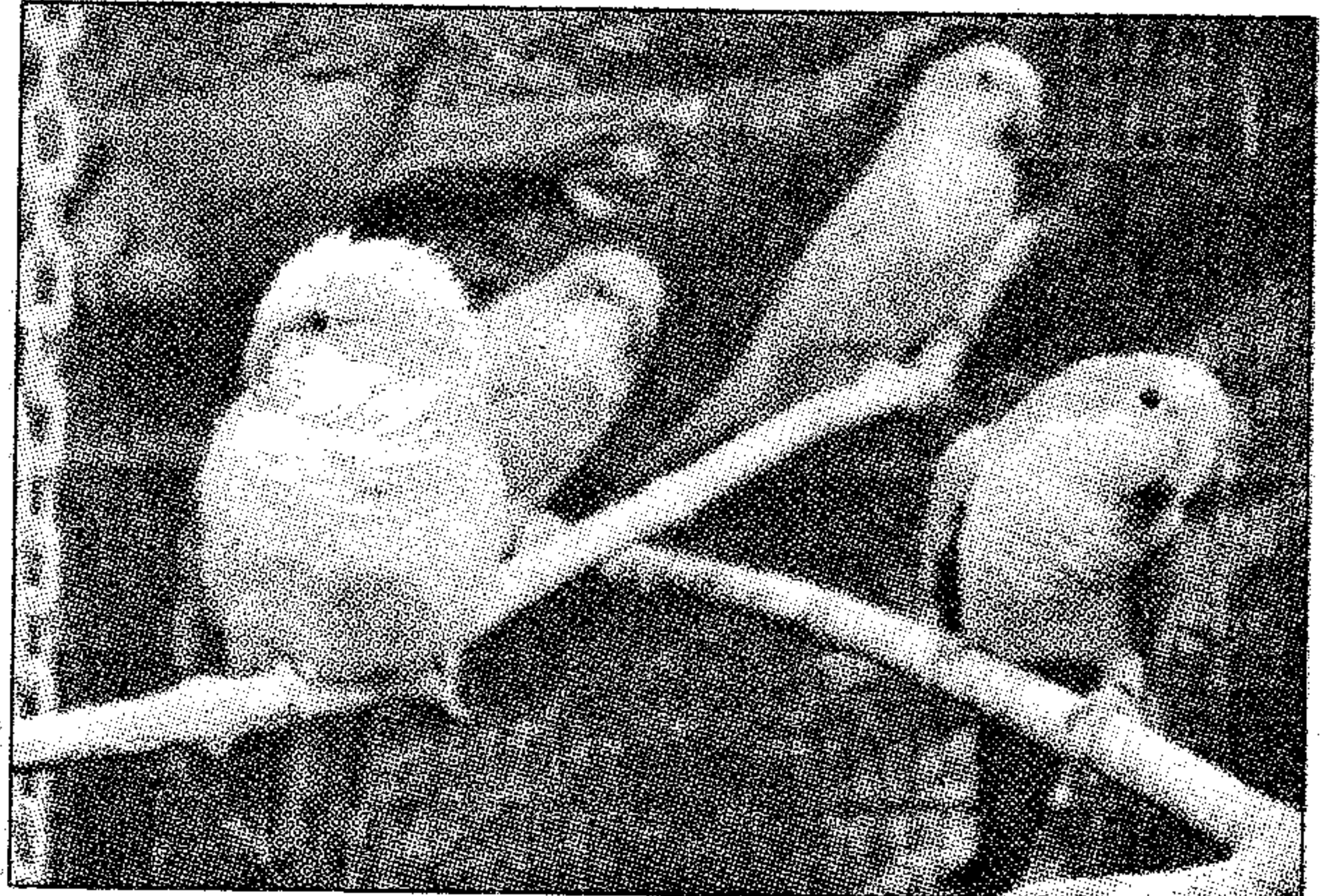
The fact that they are ille-

gal in New Hampshire hasn't stopped the sale of these birds in some New Hampshire pet stores, at least not yet.

"They are sold here, and clearly labeled as Quaker parrots," said Diane McGrade of Pets Plus in Londonderry. "We were just inspected last Thursday by the state, and we passed with flying colors — no issues. They saw the birds on our shelves, and there was no problem. If we have to, we'll ship them down to our store in Tewksbury, Mass. They are legal there."

"Our inspectors are not charged with identifying species on their inspections," said Cynthia M. Heisler, program assistant II with the Animal Industry Division of the state's Department of Agriculture.

"They are more concerned with the conditions the animals are kept in than what type of animals are sold there. I can see how it could be confusing for people; we are in charge of regulating the stores, where weird animals falls under Fish and Game, but that's their regulation."



JOSH GIBNEY/UNION LEADER

Suzanne Burke of Nashua has been told she has 30 days to get her Quaker parrots, seen here, out of New Hampshire.

Continued From Page A1