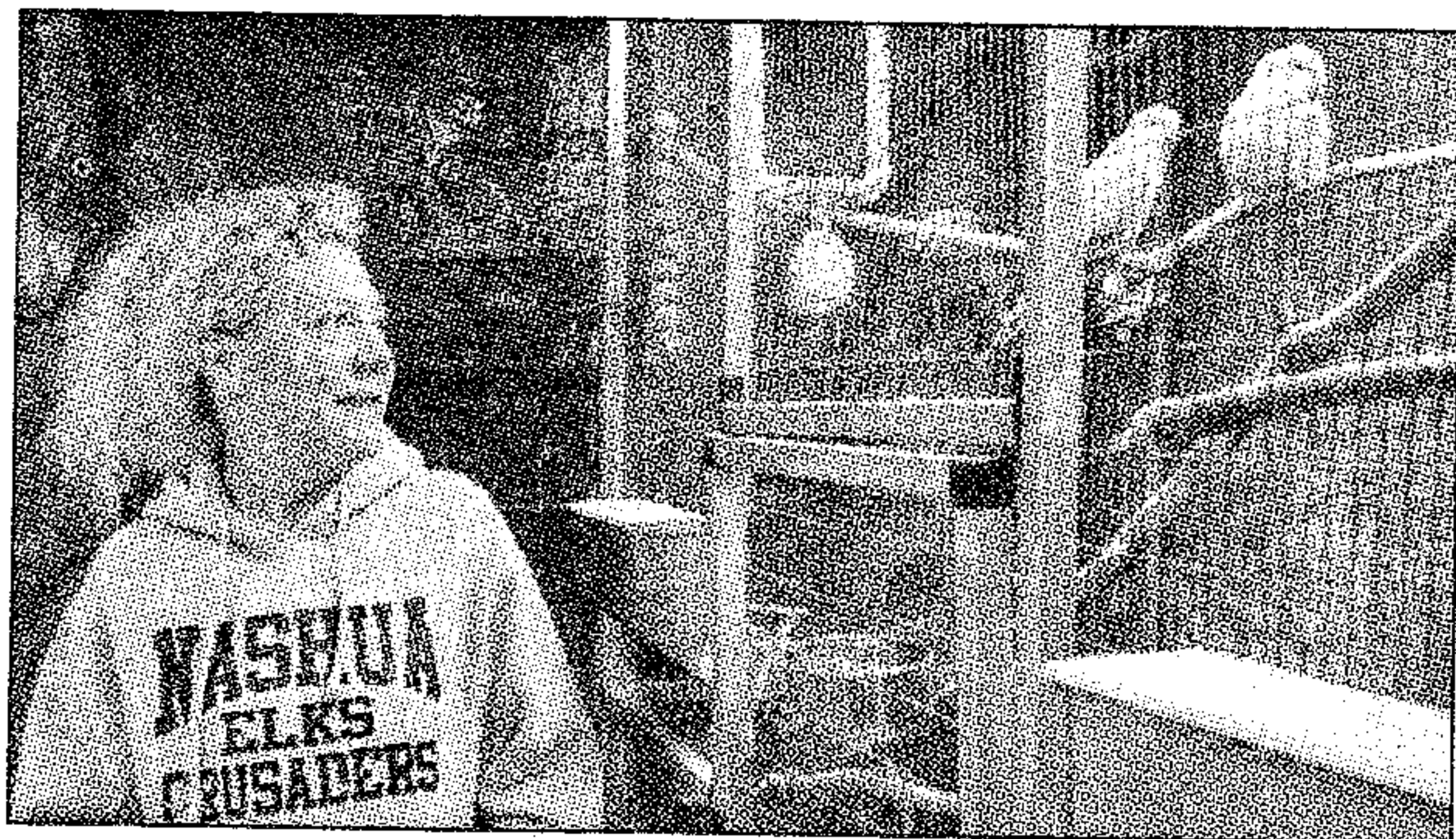


News of banned birds creates a flutter

Suzanne Burke talks about her Quaker parrots Wednesday in her Nashua home. The birds are illegal in New Hampshire.

JOSH GIBNEY/
UNION LEADER



◆ **Lawmaker outraged:** She's looking into making parrot species legal to own.

By PAUL FEELY
New Hampshire Union Leader

The plight of bird owners across New Hampshire, whose feathered friends are living here illegally, generated reactions from as far away as Texas and Virginia,

and as close as the State House in Concord.

As first reported in the New Hampshire Union Leader on Thursday, Nashua resident Suzanne Burke was informed on Sunday by a New Hampshire Fish and Game field officer that she had 30 days to find a new home for her Quaker parrots, also known as Monk parakeets, because they appear on a

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list of species illegal to own in the state. Fish and Game officials became aware she had the birds after she called asking about their status.

The story stirred outrage in one state representative, who vowed to file a bill to remove the Monk parakeet from the banned list.

"I was so angry when I read this," said Rep. Jeanine Notter, R-Merrimack. "I am a pet lover, and any pet owner knows how attached you become to your pets. To think the state is going to go into this woman's home and take her pets, and possibly euthanize them? I was outraged. I went to the Speaker today to ask if I could file a bill to put an end to this."

The deadline to request legislation this year has passed, but Notter has requested permission to file a late request.

"If I can't file it this year, I will next year, but we're trying to get it in as soon as we can," Notter said.

Burke's story generated a stir among members of the Quaker Parakeet Society of America, based in Virginia.

"I thought that the New Hampshire State motto was 'Live Free or Die,' not 'We'll Come into Your Home and Seize Your Pets!'" said John Davey, the group's president.

He said he had advised Burke to contact the New Hampshire Legal Aid Society.

"The New Hampshire laws and regulations regarding ownership of Quaker parrots have never been very clear," Davey said, noting the rule is "buried within a number of very legalese paragraphs."

The birds are outlawed in a number of states. Connecticut cites the bird's habit of building nests on power lines and utility poles.

"This is an invasive species," Fish and Game Lt. Robert Bryant said earlier this week. "I have talked to folks in Connecticut about them, and I was told

they are not a species you want to have in your state. We don't even let animal exhibitors have them here."

Davey said that Quakers are getting an undeserved reputation as an invasive species.

"In their native South American habitat, Argentina and Uruguay, Monk (Quaker) parakeets are considered agricultural pests," said Davey. "Farmers shoot, trap, and poison them. There are no accurate scientific studies to prove whether these birds are or are not threats to crops, but they are a favorite anecdotal scapegoat and are used to get crop support payments from various governments."

Davey said the thought of the birds establishing a feral colony in New Hampshire is unrealistic due to the climate.

"The birds would have better luck winning the New Hampshire lottery and moving south," he said. "It's not going to happen."