

Question: Why do these birds carry illegal status in some states?

Answer: American pet owners call Monk Parakeets Quaker Parrots, because of a Parkinson's-like shaking or quivering that young birds perform when they are begging for food. In their native South American habitat - Argentina and Uruguay - Monk (Quaker) Parakeets are considered agricultural pests. 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.

Quakers come from temperate climates - their native South American climates are much like the climates in a large portion of the United States, so they are not endangered and will survive in temperate US climates. These particular parrots build large stick nests and can survive reasonably cold winters. There are large nests of wild Quakers in Chicago and in Brooklyn - to name two of the colder cities that host these birds. There are also wild Quaker populations in Florida, Texas, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and a number of other States. Now, American farmers are very protective of their crops and very wary of introduced (non-native) species. Agricultural lobbies in a number of states have influenced the passage of laws and regulations to outlaw these birds. Almost all of these laws and regulations are enforced only when there is a distinct threat to state agriculture or to native birds. (That means that they are almost never enforced, unless someone begins a personal campaign to eradicate the birds.)

It turns out that there have been no large wild Quaker populations in ANY North American agricultural areas. We do not think that there ever will be wild colonies in agricultural areas. The wild Quakers seem to prefer urban areas for their nests. Almost all the local residents of all the affected states with wild Quaker populations seem to like and adopt their wild birds as informal mascots. Residents of an area in Brooklyn have renamed a small urban park: "Wild Parrot Park" - after their wild Quaker population. The wild Quakers do not appear to interfere with Native American species. We have picture after picture of wild Quakers peacefully feeding with native species.

Question: Do you have contact with many people in New Hampshire who own these birds - I'm trying to get a handle on how many people here may be in the same boat as Ms. Burke if the state is indeed cracking down on owning them. Any idea on the potential number of owners here in New Hampshire?

Answer: We honestly don't know how many people in New Hampshire own Quakers. Quakers have - for years - been popular pet parrots. They are intelligent, easy to train, relatively inexpensive, and readily available. The New Hampshire laws and regulations regarding ownership of Quaker parrots have never been very clear. I have asked a lawyer friend to review the current documentation regarding ownership of Quaker Parrots, and I have advised Ms. Burke to contact the New Hampshire Legal Aid Society regarding her situation. The Quaker Parakeet Society keeps a listing of states where these birds

are illegal, and the New Hampshire comments on legality and illegality of Quaker Parakeets are buried within a number of very legalese paragraphs. I imagine that there are many people in the Granite State who own and breed Quakers - not realizing that there may be a state law or regulation that may prohibit them. Quakers are a very popular pet bird.

The Quaker Parakeet Society discourages people from owning these birds in states where the ownership is illegal or prohibited. However, I'm certain that there are many people who unknowingly and unwittingly own these parrots.

Question: Could you as President of your society issue a statement on the fact that NH apparently is now cracking down on owning Quakers for the first time, even though the law has been in effect apparently since 1998? Is the species really that dangerous to life as we know it here in the Granite State?

Answer: I thought that the New Hampshire State motto was "Live Free or Die!" – not - "We'll Come into Your Home and Seize Your Pets!" Based on all available scientific and anecdotal information, I consider that the Quaker Parakeets resident in New Hampshire to pose no threat to state agriculture or to native species. It would take a coordinated release of all the pet Quakers in the state – in the same place, at the same time, at an optimum time, and with tremendous luck on climate, temperature, and food for the birds to have even an outside chance of establishing a wild colony. The birds would have better luck winning the NH lottery and moving south. It's not going to happen.

Remember, these are all pet birds that have begun to lose their natural foraging and scouting instincts. They would be subject to predators, food availability, and the cold, cold New Hampshire winters. Quaker parakeets are pets that mean a lot to their owners, both emotionally and financially. The vast majority of Quaker owners and breeders like Ms. Burke take a lot of care to ensure that their pet Quakers do not escape.

The Quaker Parakeet Society has pursued an active effort to convince state wildlife and agricultural organizations to lift the ban on Quaker Parakeets as pets in all states. There is no scientific proof that these birds - in their very limited numbers - are any threat to state and local agriculture and to native species. The vast, vast majority of Quaker owners and breeders are very careful to control their domestic birds, and there are few escapes. Based on the limited knowledge we have, a few escaped birds will almost always perish on the wild. It would take a large number of birds to escape to form a wild colony, and the escaped birds that do establish colonies seem to favor urban settings. This is not the case with Ms. Burke and her small group of birds. She is a seasoned and knowledgeable breeder who takes care to ensure that her birds are well cared-for and cannot escape into the wild.

The Quaker Parakeet Society discourages any bird owner from letting a pet bird into the wild. That is a cruel and inhumane practice. Almost all freed or escaped birds are doomed to death by starvation or by

the acts of predators. We have established a formal rescue and replacement organization that will take and resettle any unwanted Quaker parakeets. This is not the case with Ms. Burke - who is an honest and sincere breeder of these birds as pets, and a New Hampshire Businesswoman. I don't know why the Granite State is cracking down on Quaker Parakeets and their owners and breeders at this time. I would encourage the state legislature and the state agencies to reconsider this approach. New Hampshire has a climate at the northernmost range of these parrots, and I believe that any escaped birds would be very hard pressed to establish a wild colony. I also believe that a dedicated and knowledgeable breeder like Ms. Burke would not allow her birds to escape, at all.