

Couple pleads guilty to 15 counts of animal cruelty

By MICHAEL MORTENSEN, The Laconia Daily Sun

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Edith Daughten and Nicholas Torrey leave Fourth Circuit Court-District Division-Laconia Tuesday after pleading guilty to 15 charges of animal cruelty. Authorities took possession of dozens of malnourished and sick animals on the couple's property last summer. (Michael Mortensen/Laconia Daily Sun)

NEW HAMPTON — A former New Hampton couple found to have dozens of ill or malnourished domestic and wild animals in their possession last summer pleaded guilty Tuesday to 15 complaints of animal cruelty and were ordered to pay thousands of dollars in restitution to the animal shelters which subsequently took the animals in.

Edith Daughen, 28, and Nicholas Torrey, 30, formerly of 25 Clement Road, in New Hampton, entered the pleas before Judge James Carroll in Fourth Circuit Court-District Division-Laconia.

Carroll accepted their pleas during a 45-minute hearing, and ordered them to make monthly payments to cover the care costs incurred by the New Hampshire Humane Society — \$13,474.26 — and Live and Let Live Rescue Farm & Sanctuary — \$5,336. The restitution, plus a 17 percent administrative fee of \$3,197.74, is to be paid off within five years.

The judge also fined each of the defendants \$22,230, but suspended the fine on condition of five years of good behavior. In addition, he ordered that Daughen and Torrey can only possess one dog, a Jack Russell terrier named Jackson, and that they must take the dog to a veterinarian every six months to ensure the animal is being well-cared for and in good health.

Dressed in winter parkas, first Daughen, and then Torrey admitted to failing to properly care for seven dogs, two cats, a python, a parakeet, a type of lizard called a skink, and a tortoise. The python and parakeet were already dead when authorities first came to the couple's property last July. One of the horses died a day later.

The couple pleaded innocent to the same charges at their arraignment last Oct. 18. When they were arrested last Aug. 8, they were charged with 44 counts of animal cruelty.

Authorities were called to the Clement Road property on July 26 at the request of a state Agriculture Department veterinary technician who said conditions there were unsatisfactory, New Hampton prosecutor Anthony Esty told the judge. He said animals on the property included cats, dogs, reptiles, birds, gerbils, and non-domestic animals. Many of the animals had no access to food or water, he said.

Ultimately Daughen allowed authorities to take possession of 43 animals they found on the unlicensed animal rescue facility, which the couple called White Gates Critter Sanctuary. Some were taken away on July 26, and the rest on Aug. 1.

“They started this facility, perhaps with good intentions,” Esty said, “and got in over their heads.”

After the hearing, Esty said he was pleased with the resolution of the case.

“The goal was to make these two responsible for the cost of (the animals’) care, and to limit their ability to re-collect animals,” he said.

Esty noted that the couple were charged with Class B — and not Class A — misdemeanors because they cooperated with authorities. Daughten agreed to relinquish the animals voluntarily, and investigators were allowed to search the premises without having to obtain a warrant.

Asked what will happen if Daughten and Torrey fail to complete the restitution in the required five years, Esty said, “If they have been making a good-faith effort (in their payments), we will let the payments (continue past the five-year mark). When the amount due to the animal shelters and the administrative fees are added together, the couple needs to make monthly payments of \$366 in order to meet the five-year requirement.