

New Hampshire law changes help wild critters, cats, canines

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

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SALEM, N.H. (AP) — Going well beyond the dog days of summer, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu signed three bills Wednesday aimed at protecting not just canines but cats and wild critters as well.

Animal equity was the theme for two of the new laws: One will require [drivers who injure or kill cats](#) to notify police or the pets' owners or else face a \$1,000 fine, a mandate that has long existed for run-over dogs. Another would expand the state's animal cruelty laws and make it illegal to beat, whip, torture or mutilate any wild animal, fish or bird.

The third bill, however, focuses squarely on dogs, making it a misdemeanor to maliciously remove a tracking collar or microchip from someone else's dog. The bill, which also makes stealing a dog a felony for a second offense, was prompted by what supporters described as a growing problem of "dog flipping" in which people steal dogs to sell for profit.

"Even though it's not a big budget item, these things are really, really important," said Sununu, who signed the bills surrounded by lawmakers and advocates outside the Salem Animal Rescue League shelter. "We're not gonna just let this stuff pass by, we can really do something about it. Animals are a bipartisan issue."

Dog theft is a misdemeanor under current law, which is silent on stealing cats. Both Sununu and Rep. Daryl Abbas, sponsor of the bill requiring the reporting of run-over cats, said lawmakers should take a look at that next year.

Abbas drafted his bill after his wife found their 5-year-old cat, Arrow, dead on the street near their Salem home in July 2019. His other cat, Banshee, waited near the door for his "brother" to return for days, he said, but now enjoys the family's new cat, Luna.

"Despite this being inspired by a tragic incident, I thought, we can still make New Hampshire better," he said. "We should always be working for a better New Hampshire and I think by passing this bill, we did."

The animal cruelty bill makes it a misdemeanor to negligently beat, whip, torture or mutilate any type of wildlife, or a felony for doing so purposely. Current law applies only to domestic animals, household pets and captive wildlife, and similar bills had failed in 2017, 2018 and 2020. In 2019, several high school football players in Moultonborough were suspended from games and required to perform community service after video surfaced of them killing a duck. Fish and Game officials said at the time that they could have cited the boys' parents for illegal taking of a duck, a violation-level offense.

Jinelle Hobson, director of the Salem Animal Rescue League, said New Hampshire had been one of only four states without such a law.

"Together, these new laws will strengthen the state's ability to prevent needless suffering for pets and their owners, as well as wild animals," she said.