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NEWS

Alligator found in Mill Pond

Exotic reptile, most likely abandoned, taken to local vet

By Clarissa Hamlin



Courtesy Central Veterinary Associates

Dr. John Charos, director of avian and exotics medicine at Central Veterinary Associates in Valley Stream, with the alligator that was found in Mill Pond on June 4.

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midday that Saturday. The residents, new to Valley Stream, according to officials, were visiting the park and spotted the alligator, said Dr. John Charos, director of avian and exotics medicine at Central Veterinary Associates, who cared for the alligator. After the couple captured it, at around 2 p.m., they called Central Vet.

“We got a phone call from someone new in the neighborhood,” Charos recalled, “and they said they had seen an alligator in the pond there. They asked who should they call, and I told them I would be happy to take in the alligator because we have worked on reptiles before.”

About a half-hour later, Charos said, the man arrived at the Merrick Road veterinary office with the alligator in a three-foot postal box. Charos, who has been practicing veterinary medicine on exotic animals for more than 20 years, examined the alligator. “It was in good shape, very healthy, and well-fed,” he said.

The employees also bonded with the alligator — which they dubbed “Chompers” — before it was transported to a facility in Massachusetts on June 8.

The Nassau County district attorney’s Animal Cruelty Unit is investigating an incident involving a two-and-a-half-foot-long alligator that was removed from Mill Pond in Edward W. Cahill Memorial Park in Valley Stream on June 4.

A “civilian experienced with handling exotics” captured the alligator, according to Chris Munzing, a spokesman for District Attorney Kathleen Rice. The alligator was immediately brought to Central Veterinary Associates in Valley Stream, most likely having been abandoned by its owners, officials said.

“It was most likely placed in the pond after it grew too large for its owner to take care of,” Munzing said.

A local couple, whose names were not released, discovered the exotic creature at the pond around

Charos quickly realized that the alligator had not been outside for long before it was discovered. Although there were no visible signs of abuse or injuries, the incident could still be considered animal cruelty, he said. Under state law, it is illegal not only to abandon an animal, but to keep any exotic animals in a residence without a special state Department of Environmental Conservation certification. The alligator would most likely have frozen to death when winter arrived if it had been left in the pond, Charos noted. It also posed a threat to the public. “Even an alligator of that size can endanger the lives of people,” Charos said, “especially adults, children and their pets who like to frequent the pond during the weekend.”

Charos notified the district attorney about the discovery of the animal.

Rice’s office also offered a statement of precaution. “While the D.A.’s office currently does not have reason to believe that there is any additional non-native wildlife in Mill Pond Park,” Munzing said, “it is advising all park visitors to remain vigilant.”

Valley Stream village park maintenance staff members checked the pond and surrounding area following the alligator’s removal, according to Village Clerk Bob Barra, who declared the pond “alligator free.” Every thing else seems to be fine at the pond, he added.

Oddly enough, an alligator turtle, a snapping turtle with a large-spiked shell, was removed from the same area on the same weekend as the alligator, Barra said. A variety of snapping turtles can often be found in the Hendrickson Park lake and other Valley Stream waterways, he noted.

The county’s animal cruelty unit has notified the DEC about the incident, and is asking anyone with information to call its 24-hour hotline at (516) 571-2245.