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Posted on Fri, Jun. 29, 2007 **Police catch gator in Charlotte**

GREG LACOUR

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Animal Control is holding an exotic and unusual guest in a cage next door to a fellow reptile.

It's a 5-pound baby alligator, roughly 20 inches long, that residents in an east Charlotte neighborhood spotted walking across a church parking lot and sunning itself in a nearby creek before Animal Control officers could snatch it.

Animal Control has contacted the regional biologist for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, who'll examine the gator and determine what to do with it, said agency spokeswoman Melissa Knically-Berry. The American alligator -- assuming that's what it is -- isn't native to this part of the state, although they are found closer to the ocean in both Carolinas and throughout the Southeast.

Until then, it'll sit in a space in the agency's exotics section, along with a pan of water, straw and newspaper and next to a Burmese Python, Knically-Berry said. Officers haven't yet determined its gender.

Animal Control doesn't know how it got to Charlotte, although they have an idea. "Our best determination in something like this is that someone went to Florida or South Carolina, bought it, thinking, 'Oh, this is kind of cool,' and it was cool until it started growing," she said. "Then they just dumped it."

Alligators love water. So it made a home in or near a creek near Willow Ridge Assisted Living Center on Milton Road. On June 5, some residents saw it walking across a church parking lot toward the creek, where others saw it hiding underneath some debris.

The residents called Animal Control, which called the Wildlife Resources Commission, which set a trap, which failed to catch the gator. It hid. On June 14, Wildlife pulled up its trap.

Then, on Wednesday, Animal Control received another call from a resident who said he was looking at the gator as it sunned itself in the creek. Officers went into the creek to fish it out of its lair, and this time caught it.

Animal Control rarely receives reports of alligators, but it's not unheard of, especially during summer, Knically-Berry said. The agency last caught one about a year ago, she



said.





Animal Control hasn't determined the reptile's gender. The agency has called a biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to examine the gator and decide what to do with it. American alligators aren't native to this part of North Carolina, and it's illegal to keep them as pets.