



Tony Cavallaro shows photos of his alligator, Albert, on Tuesday in Hamburg, New York. Albert was seized by the Department of Environmental Conservation in mid-March. (AP Photo/Carolyn Thompson)

## Man's pet alligator seized

The owner of a 34-year-old alligator who was recently seized by conservation officers in New York is fighting for its return.

By CAROLYN THOMPSON  
*Associated Press*

The owner of an alligator recently seized by conservation officers in New York is fighting for its return, saying the reptile he named Albert and has shared a home with for more than three decades is a gentle giant that's no danger to anyone.

Officers a week ago met Tony Cavallaro in the driveway of his suburban Buffalo home with a warrant, before sedating the 12-foot (3.6-meter), 750-pound (340-kilogram) alligator, taping his mouth and [driving him away in a van](#).

Cavallaro's license to keep Albert, who is 34-years-old, had expired in 2021, the Department of Environmental Conservation said. But even if it had been renewed, Cavallaro had let other people pet the alligator, even get in the pool with him, providing grounds for the removal under the rules for keeping animals classified as dangerous, the department said.

Cavallaro, 64, sees Albert differently. His alligator was born and raised in captivity and has never showed signs of aggression toward people or other animals, he said.

He recalled finding Albert curled up with his dog on the dog's bed when the alligator was smaller.

"He's just a big baby," Cavallaro said Tuesday, showing pictures of Albert gripping a stuffed alligator in its teeth and resting his chin on a stack of pillows.

Cavallaro has hired a lawyer in hopes of getting Albert back, and his efforts are being backed by his own neighbors as well as strangers across social media.

An online petition has been signed by more than 120,000 people and fans have created "Free Albert" T-shirts and buttons.

A friend even penned a song for the cause: "Oh Albert, please come home," the pal sings while strumming a guitar in a video posted to Facebook.

Cavallaro has lived with Albert for more than half of his life after buying

the alligator at an Ohio reptile show when it was two months old and considers him an "emotional support animal."

He spent \$120,000 on a custom addition to his house designed around Albert, complete with heated floors, a filtering indoor pond with a waterfall and spa jet, tropical plants and a bar.

Now it's hard to enter the space, Cavallaro said, gathering up the stack of Albert's pillows he said had been tossed aside by the officer and returning them to the carpet where the alligator liked to lay.

"It's so empty," said Cavallaro, who wasn't told where the alligator was taken.

Cavallaro acknowledges that acquaintances and their children have also been up close and personal with Albert, posing for pictures and petting him, occasionally getting in the water.

But he says Albert is so affectionate that he hurries to the side of the pool to greet Cavallaro's 84-year-old mother when she visits.

See **ALBERT**, next page

**ALBERT**, from previous page

“She would sit in his room with him and read with him laying his head on her foot,” he said.

The license became an issue following a change in regulations for possessing dangerous animals adopted by the Department of Environmental Conservation in 2020.

After Cavallaro’s license expired in 2021, he failed to bring the holding area into compliance to ensure the alligator did not pose a danger to the public, the agency said.

Cavallaro said he unsuccessfully sought clarification to renew the license and believes he should have been grandfathered into the old regulations.

Owning Albert is the culmination of a lifelong interest in reptiles, said Cavallaro, who has previously owned caimans, similar to an alligator, a monitor and a menagerie of lizards.



This photo shows Albert with a stuffed alligator toy inside the custom enclosure Cavallaro built for the reptile in his house. (Tony Cavallaro via AP)

“It’s just a fascination. I love these animals and learned a lot about them,” he said.

He disputes the DEC’s claim that Albert has “numerous health-related issues, including blindness in both eyes and spinal complications.”

The alligator, who subsists on a diet of raw chicken and pork chops supplemented by vitamins, is under the care of a veterinarian, including for cataracts, but Cavallaro said he is not blind.

He said there was nothing wrong with the alligator’s spine before it was carried away.

DEC officials declined to say where Albert is being kept.

In a statement, the agency said only that he’s with “a licensed caretaker who will house and care for the animal until it can be properly transported for permanent care.”

Albert’s return to home is unknown.

## A fisherman reeled in a big one

*Associated Press*

A fisherman at a lake in northeast Tennessee caught a surprise at the end of his line when he pulled up a 3 to 4-foot-long alligator.

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency said their Union County wildlife officer Rick Roberts got a call from the angler on Monday describing the unusual catch at Norris Lake.

When Roberts arrived, the angler had pinned the alligator to the ground behind its head and told Roberts he caught it on a swim bait.

Alligators are not native to that part of Tennessee.

They are considered Class 1 wildlife species, which are those that are inherently dangerous to humans.

They may only be possessed by permitted exhibitors or commercial propagators.

Matthew Cameron, regional communications coordinator for



An alligator was caught by an angler in Norris Lake in Union County, Tennessee, on Monday. (Rick Roberts/Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency via AP Agency via AP)

TWRA, said the alligator was taken to Little Ponderosa Zoo and Rescue.

Little Ponderosa Zoo and Rescue is an exotic animal rescue facility in Clinton, Tennessee.

“While the origin of the alligator is unclear, it is evident that it was being illegally held in captivity and possibly

released into Norris Lake,” Cameron said in an email.

Cameron said the zoo doesn’t normally house alligators

The operators are looking for a permanent home for the alligator. It’s unknown how long that will take those operators.