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Pity the Poor Gator, Lost in All the Roar

By JAMES BARRON

Now it is time to look at things from the alligator's point of view.

The tiger became an instant superstar whose fame lasted more than 15 minutes. He got his mug, all mean and menacing, on the front pages and was mentioned on late-night comedy shows. He went from a seven-room apartment in Harlem to an even bigger home where he will have his own swimming pool. He was lionized by his owner, Antoine Yates, who continued to profess undying love after he was arraigned on Tuesday in Manhattan Criminal Court.

Not a word about the gator, whom Mr. Yates seems not to have bothered to name. Or, if he did, the alligator's name was lost in all the hoopla about a tiger in an apartment.

Think about it: ordinarily, a 65-pound alligator in an apartment would be news. But put a tiger in the same apartment, and the alligator is all but ignored. Not to mention the indignity of being mistaken for a caiman. That is enough to give an alligator an inferiority complex. And alligators are not accustomed to inferiority complexes any more than they are accustomed to apartment complexes. An alligator is accustomed to waddling around thinking, to the extent that alligators think coherent thoughts that can be translated into words, attention must be paid — to me, right now.

Willy Loman an alligator is not, except when his apartment-mate is a tiger.

So neighborly get-togethers between the occupants of Apartment 5-E at 2430 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard where, the animal experts say, they must have had separate bedrooms, were out of the question. Had there been even a moment of face time, "there would be no alligator," said James Doherty, the general curator of the Bronx Zoo. Or, as Larry Wallach, the animal handler who hauled the alligator and the tiger away from Mr. Yates's building, said, "That would be like Mighty Joe Young meeting Godzilla."

But the alligator might not have been unhappy with apartment life. "I don't see that it would be, if it grew up this way," Mr. Doherty said.

The creature comforts that matter to a creature with scaly skin and an appetite for whole chickens are different from those of other tenants, who care more about the height of ceilings or the view of the outside. "I don't think he would climb up and look out the window," said Bill Holmstrom, the zoo's collection manager for reptiles. "I don't think he would stare out a window like a cat might do, but you never know."

An eat-in kitchen would not have mattered much, Mr. Holmstrom said, since the alligator could not drink from the kitchen faucet. (He would have liked to duck under the surface in a full bathtub.)
Mr. Yates said it was Ming the tiger who became toothy. Soon Mr. Yates was on the way to the hospital with a story the doctors did not believe about a too-frisky pit bull, and Ming was on the way to fame.

And the alligator? It was almost as if he had been placed in a reptile-protection program. No one seemed to know where he was, assuming he is a he. (No one seemed to know that, either, or, this being New York, whether he had clawed his way to Mr. Yates's domain after crawling out of a sewer.)

It took a few telephone calls to find out that he spent Saturday night with his 5 1/2-foot frame stretched out in front of the television, watching "The Crocodile Hunter," the Animal Planet series with the Australian adventurer Steve Irwin.

What was the alligator's favorite moment? "When we were able to shut off the program," said Mr. Wallach, who has named the alligator Lucky and was stretched out with him at his house on Long Island.

"I don't think Lucky wanted to be reminded of what people do to chase crocodiles." Even though, of course, a crocodile is an entirely different species from an alligator.

Like Ming, he is now in Ohio, though only temporarily. He will be moved to a wildlife sanctuary in Indiana next week. For now, they are 56 miles apart — Ming is in Berlin Center, and Lucky is in Columbia Station, where he has his own converted horse stall, surrounded, once again, by other creatures, including bears and a pair of albino raccoons.

"He's kind of keeping to himself, not neighborly," said Sam Mazzola, who runs Lucky's home, World Animal Studios. "It opened its mouth and chased me out of the way the first night it was here." By Tuesday, he said, "It's sitting under the heat lamp giving me the eyeball. Reptiles, you can't tell. They don't smile, they don't growl, they just bite when they feel like it."