

Dog Lover's HELL

*There is a children's nursery rhyme that goes like this:
"There was an old woman who lived in a shoe;
She had so many children she didn't know what to do."*

Six years ago in Tenri, Nara Prefecture, there was an old man who kept too many dogs. Because people knew he liked dogs they came and threw away their unwanted dogs at his place and he always took them in. As the years passed he ran out of money and his health deteriorated to a point he was hobbling around with a stick. His place had become a 'hell-hole.' The dogs ravaged by disease and malnutrition died one by one. Gradually a pile of dead dogs stuffed in plastic bags became a ghoully haunt where the living dogs were forced to live on top of the dead.

It was only after an intense international campaign was launched by ARK that Nara Prefecture took action. It removed all the dogs to newly-built facilities nearby and with the skill and efforts of the hokensho veterinarians working round-the-clock, was able in six months to restore the dogs' health, to rehabilitate them and to find them homes.

But next door to the old man was an old woman who also kept dogs in a growing hell-hole. Unlike the old man she refused to give them up. The difference between the two was that whereas the old man had accumulated dogs that were dumped at his place, the old woman's numbers grew by inbreeding because none were neutered. As time has passed the numbers have remained constant; dogs being born replacing those dying of disease.

The situation which ARK saw when we visited the place on July 2nd is truly appalling and a case of severe neglect and cruelty to living things. However at 75 and with no other place to go, no money to neuter or treat the animals and naturally a reluctance to hand them over to the hokensho to be killed, the old woman has no way out.

The old woman is a classic case of a collector, someone who claims to love animals but overwhelmed by numbers and unable to cope, ends up with a hell-hole. It is however the system rather than the old woman we should blame. The lack of laws, the apathy of officials and their reluctance to get involved, the need to define cruelty and to act early before the situation gets out of hand.

Some of these dogs have only a short time left before weakened by their horrendous skin conditions, they will die. Urgent action is needed.

We propose the following compromise solution:

Nara Prefecture should provide fresh (uncontaminated) land and proper facilities for both the old woman and the dogs.

The dogs should be removed in small numbers from the present site to Nara veterinary clinics, to be treated first to cure the skin



diseases, by eliminating the fleas and parasites, then neutered and taken to the new facility.

Providing the facility is regularly checked and the number of dogs remains constant, we feel the old woman should be able to cope.

This solution hinges on (1) whether the old woman will give her consent to this plan and (2) whether Nara Prefecture is prepared to help.

We have already approached Nara Prefecture in the hope that as in the previous case it will take prompt action and show animal lovers both overseas and in Japan that it sincerely has the welfare of animals at heart.

Postscript:

Nara Prefecture's answer to our request to deal with this case was as follows:

The situation is different from the Tenri case six years ago since the animals concerned are kept by a private individual and the hokensho has no power or authority to act unless that individual voluntarily hands over the animals. Under the current law animals are regarded as private possessions (like televisions or bicycles) rather than as living things to be protected. Many of the animals at the old woman's place have in fact been dumped there by irresponsible people and so these people are as much to blame for the situation.

ARK's viewpoint:

To us this is a clear cut case of cruelty, not because the dogs are beaten, kicked or tortured deliberately but because they are severely neglected. But we cannot bring about prosecution because the law does not define cruelty and there is no system in Japan to deal with neglectful owners like this.

Since the law and the authorities are unable to do anything, we have to deal with the situation as it stands, to depend on our own resources and that of volunteers. We also need the co-operation of the old woman to try to get these animals some basic treatment and care.

The dogs need de-worming, vaccination, filaria testing, treatment for their skin problems and neutering all of which will depend on the help of vets and will be costly. The site will need to be cleared and sterilized. We have to try to reduce numbers by rehoming and trying to prevent more animals being dumped there. (3 puppies were recently dumped there but have been rehomed).

The tragedy is though, this is by no means a rare case in Japan. There are many more collectors out there as yet undiscovered. Without proper animal protection laws and enforcement, Japanese animals will be destined to live in hell-holes like this.