

What would YOU do ? Part 7

Can you truly call yourself an Animal Lover ?

by Masayo Furuki

There are a lot of people out there who call themselves animal lovers, and indeed many of them have dogs and cats of their own. But looking at them from our perspective, we have to wonder whether many of them truly can be called animal lovers in the real sense of the word. I'll introduce several examples here, so that readers can judge for themselves.

Many people consider their pet as one of the family, which is fine and indeed as it should be - but sometimes this way of thinking extends to treating the animal exactly the same as a human being. While people who do this seem to believe this is in fact the measure of love and proper care for an animal, sometimes it can be misplaced, and indeed harmful for the animal itself.



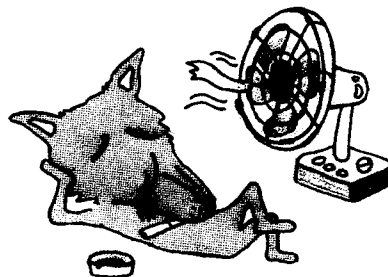
Food and Love

For example, there are dog owners who proudly assert they would never feed their pet anything so disgusting as dog food; their pet eats exactly the same food as the rest of the family. However, what tastes good to human beings contains too much salt for dogs and is inappropriate for them. Dog food, on the other hand is, true to its name, prepared especially for dogs, and contains the proper balance of nutrients they need. With the recent "pet boom," Japanese dog food manufacturers are now producing food that is tailored to specific dietary needs, such as those of puppies and adult, elderly and overweight dogs. Other people object to commercial dog food for health reasons, as it may contain chemical additives. But the same can be said of foods people eat as well, many of which contain colouring agents and preservatives. If you insist on avoiding commercial dog food for your pet, do not feed it what you eat, but prepare special food with little or no fat, salt and spicy ingredients.

Dogs Living Indoors

Many people live with their dogs inside the house. Although this is fine for small lapdogs, it is doubtful whether energetic larger dogs can be happy living only indoors. If you live

in an apartment however there is no other choice but you must ensure your dog has at least two good walks a day. Young puppies, elderly or sick dogs may need little or no exercise but young healthy dogs should spend the daytime at least outdoors, running free in the garden and exposed to sunlight and fresh air. Being over-protective and keeping your pet inside all day, with cooling in the summer and heating in the winter, will lower its resistance to disease and cannot be



considered good for its health. Meanwhile, some people keep their pets chained on short leashes when indoors because they mess up the furniture and break things, but this not only defeats the purpose of having them inside, it is also cruel and inhumane. If a dog has cool shade in summer and a warm doghouse with a soft blanket in winter, it can live happily and comfortably outdoors. Of course it also needs attention; petting brushing and being played with. Some people take their dogs with them everywhere, often by car. In summer this means subjecting them to terrible heat, which can cause heat-stroke and death. If there is no special need for your dog to accompany you, it is kinder to leave it at home in the shade when you go out in summer.

Pet Loss

The grief that follows a beloved pet's death is terrible, as anyone who has had this experience knows. I have often heard people say they will never own a pet again because they couldn't bear such pain a second time; others say they love animals and would like to have a pet, but don't because they can't face the idea of its dying. While we who are involved in animal rescue know the feeling only too well, I can only say this attitude is very unfortunate. The dogs and cats at

ARK were abandoned or mistreated by their previous owners, and spend their days here hoping to find new homes with kind and loving families. When we ask people, whose pets have died, to consider adopting one of ARK's animals, some of them refuse for the above reason. Although we understand their sadness, we wish they could overcome it to give a home to an animal in need. The deceased pet will live forever in their hearts and memories, while other animals alive in the world today need their love and care. And a new pet can help people get over their loss, bringing smiles and happiness back into their lives. Wouldn't this be the best way of honouring their dead pets? There are other people who, unable to bear the thought of losing their pet, say they want to die first. While this is all right if there is someone, who will lovingly care for the animal after the owner dies, what will happen to the pet if this is not the case? ARK has seen cases of animals brought in like used clothing, by families because their owner has died. Even when we plead with them to keep the animal as a way of remembering the deceased, often they refuse and we are forced to take them in. Those pets who are not brought to ARK must suffer worse fates. We must remember that it is not just people who are affected by death; the loss of a loving owner is a terrible shock for animals. And being discarded like garbage is a cruel fate no animal should experience. So while burying a pet is very sad it is much sadder to think what may happen if its owner dies first. Owners should try to live a long and healthy life, and give their pet the comfort of dying in the arms of someone they trust. Although there is still much more I want to say, with this I conclude this series that considers what it means to be a true animal lover. In a nutshell, we may say it means thinking about things from the animal's point of view. Animals are not human beings, but they have rights which should be respected. Dogs have dogs' needs, and cats have cats' needs, and these are not necessarily the same as human needs. Projecting human attitudes onto pets often has more to do with owners' self-satisfaction than their pets' well-being, and is nothing more than human egoism. Letting dogs live as dogs and cats live as cats, while giving them plenty of love and care is, I believe, the true meaning of being an animal lover. Thank you for following this column over such a long time.