

"Some Thoughts on Japanese Attitudes To Animals"

Report on a Seminar by Veterinarian Yuko Nishiyama

On December 23 last year, the first Wan's Tail open seminar was held in Tokyo. The subject was "Thinking about our relationships with pets together with an American veterinarian," and the featured speaker was Dr. Yuko Nishiyama, a veterinarian living and practicing in Los Angeles. The discussion ranged far and wide over such topics as training, neutering, breeding, hereditary diseases, abuse, euthanasia, stray cats, and shelter/rescue activities, the last of course being what we are involved in at ARK but which requires deeper thought even among those of us here. Four hours were hardly enough for such a rich and interesting discussion, but one thing that stood out in particular was the lack of awareness among Japanese pet owners in general in the areas of breeding, neutering and training.

With the "pet boom" that has taken off in recent years, the number of people buying dogs and cats on a whim, or out of fashion, has increased alarmingly. There appears to be a proportionate increase in the number of pet owners who are breeding animals without any thought of blood lines or hereditary disease. It is said that hereditary diseases number more than 400 just for those that are currently known, with new diseases being discovered every year. According to Dr. Nishiyama, "Purebreds, or pedigrees, were developed by repeatedly breeding members of the same family over generations, and are in other words highly inbred. This means it is only natural they share extremely similar genes. Since most hereditary diseases are caused by recessive genes, it is impossible to discover whether an animal is a carrier unless it undergoes testing." She emphasized the need for greater awareness of the dangers that accompany thoughtless breeding conducted without knowledge or specialized testing.

It is a fact that advertisements saying things like "Mating service available" and "We purchase puppies" abound on Japanese websites and at pet shops. Whether out of ignorance or willful disregard for the consequences, they promote breeding among pet owners, some of whom might feel from seeing them that it's a "waste" not to mate their pets. There are no doubt owners who, with this realization, begin to think of their pets as profit-generating commodities, while those who do not breed to make money but "because they're so cute" are no different in terms of thoughtlessness. Saying "it's fine because we have people who want the puppies" doesn't change the uninformed, careless nature of the activity.

When we encounter pet owners like this, or veterinarians who irresponsibly promote breeding, we need to make the effort to change their minds. It takes courage, but if each of us does this, maybe we

can make a difference and save even one animal from eventual extermination at the pound, or at least from being bought and sold like a commodity.

Before thinking about breeding, pet owners must all consider the benefits of neutering. In the U.S., apparently, the general view is that only uneducated or low-income people do not neuter their pets. Ordinarily it is the pet owner who approaches the veterinarian about neutering, not vice-versa.

Arguments in favor of neutering are generally grouped into the following four categories.

Medical arguments

- Prevents many diseases
- Controls chronic conditions
- Helps recovery from disease
- Delays outbreak of viral and other diseases

Behavioral arguments

- Results in milder disposition
- Results in emotional stability
- Decreases territoriality

Social arguments

- In litigation-prone America, minimizes cause for being sued

Reproductive arguments

- Eliminates unplanned pregnancies
- Eliminates transmission of hereditary diseases

Above all, the reality today is that there are far more animals than homes for them. Without widespread efforts to reduce the number of animals being born, we cannot reduce the number of those who will be abandoned, killed by cars and at the pound, and otherwise suffer terrible fates for the simple reason of being homeless. This is surely an issue not only in Japan and the U.S. If each of us is aware of this reality, and acts to do something about it, we can change things for the better.

Although this report focused on the issues of breeding and neutering, the seminar covered a great deal more that was highly informative and thought-provoking. It is hoped that more and more ordinary people will take part in wonderful seminars like this one to learn about what we can do for animals.

ARK's New Year Party

Many thanks to all our Kanto supporters and members who joined us at the Foreign Correspondent's Club in Tokyo in January for a New Year party. Over 60 people turned up and we hope to make many more opportunities like this, for people to meet other animal lovers. *Special thanks to Mary Corbett who arranged everything.*



東京のプレスクラブでのアーク新年会に御参加いただいた方々に感謝いたします。60名以上の方に出席頂き、動物を愛する人たち同士の交流の場にもなりました。こういったイベントを今後もしていきたいと思っています。パーティの手配を下さったメリー・コーベットさん、ありがとうございました。