

SAGA hell-hole

Japan may be a G8 nation but it's still in the Dark Ages where animal welfare is concerned. Breeders are rife in this country, all bent on making money from the pet boom. Although from June 2007, they will have to be registered and have their premises inspected, it is difficult to believe that the local authorities who are lazy and indifferent to animal abuse, will really check these places and see that standards are maintained.

A recent case in Saga Prefecture illustrates how lax the authorities are. The breeder in question has been operating for 15 years and his place is a hell-hole. The authorities have known about the conditions, they have known that dogs die there, they have known that this breeder has never vaccinated his dogs against rabies thereby contravening the Rabies Control Law, and yet they have done nothing. About 150 dogs, mostly Akitas and Shibas face a lingering death.

On 13th December 2006, we (Shimada san representing WAN LIFE and myself) flew from Osaka to Saga. The breeder runs two places; a so-called 'pet-shop' in Saga city and a breeding establishment in Kashima city, about an hour and a half's drive from Saga city. Set among tangerine orchards which are a feature of that area the complex composes of one main building with some roofed areas off it and many enclosures/cages containing dogs, scatter around. At the entrance was a red setter chained on slatted wood pallet with barely a roof over him. Next to him was an Akita, chained without roof or kennel. neither dogs had food and the water bowls only had a drop of water due to the fact it had rained the previous two days.

Around the building were enclosures of misery. Dogs chained or in cages, standing on months if not years of feces and hair. Empty dirty food bowls and empty water bowls encrusted with green algae. The expressions on the dogs' faces told of their suffering. These dogs had probably never been off their chains or out of their cages for months. The length of the dogs' claws indicated they had never been exercised. One or two of the chained dogs had swelling around their necks where the chains had dug into the neck. The far end of the main was open and I could see many dogs chained or in cages inside. In the pools of feces and rainwater were bones of dogs and at the entrance were about seven dog skulls and other bones plus a rotting dog corpse full of worms. the stench was awful. I have seen many hell-holes in Japan over 30 years but I think this one is the worst, I have ever encountered.

ARK sent prosecution papers under the names of ARK and WANLIFE through a lawyer, to Saga Prefecture Governor and Saga Police on December 26th 2006; accusing the breeder of cruelty under the Animal Protection Law 1999 and the Rabies Control law.

On the 11th January 2007 we returned to Saga where the police went through our statements and prosecution papers. The same day we had got extensive media coverage which led to Saga Prefecture announcing on the 12th that they would also prosecute the breeder. On the 13th we decided to visit his 'pet shop' in Saga city. Although there are less animals and the place is in full view of a busy road, the conditions are the same as in Kashima. This is what we found;

Two sheds consisted of small cages stacked on one another, (the sort one would normally transport animals to a vet in, never to keep animals in for an extended period), full of Shibainu, all without food or water, desperate to get out. Feces everywhere. One young Shiba had what looked like a broken leg and very long

claws indicating it had never been walked.

There was a black Shiba tied to a plastic kennel by the road which had severe diarrhoea. In front of the entrance to the shop was a brindle female Akita, noosed so tightly that when she lay down her head was held taut by the rope. This meant she could not rest her head to sleep. The shed along the road side had windows and we could see some of the cages inside. One contained the body of a young brown Shiba, lying on a about 10 centimetres of hardened feces. One on side of this was a cage with two or three Shiba puppies and on the other a Shiba which was dying. We could see its heavy breathing through the window and when it lifted its head it had severe skin lesions.

We talked to a neighbour who has a house next to the shop. He said the situation had been going on for 10 years. Neighbours around had launched petitions to have him closed down because in summer the piles of feces by the road side attracted flies and rats. But despite so many protests, the Prefecture did nothing.

We contact the police, the hokensho and the media. The hokensho and the police said that unless the owner appeared and gave his permission, there was no way they could enter the buildings. We waited from 10am until 2pm when the breeder appeared and the hokensho 'vets' were finally able to enter the building. All they did was to remove the dead Shiba and they apparently told him the cages WERE A BIT SMALL ! They said nothing about the awful conditions, the lack of food or water, the feces and filth in the cages, nor the fact these dogs had no exercise. This is not surprising since hokensho vets holding a paper license, usually have no practical experience with animals.

Under the law, it is difficult to force this breeder give up his animals or any way to seize them, nor will he be banned from keeping dogs. Even if the prosecution is successful, he may face only a fine. So we feel the only way to take action is to appeal for outside pressure from outside Japan and within, to shame Saga Prefecture into rescuing the remaining dogs, to have them treated and neutered and to find them good homes. This man should be banned for life from keeping animals. We hope it will send out a strong message to other breeders to clean up their act or face prosecution. if you know of any other breeding hell-holes, please let ARK know.

Please send your appeal to the addresses below, either by letter or email.

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Mr. Yasushi Furukawa
Governor of Saga Prefecture
1-1-59 Jounai, Saga City, Saga-ken, Kyushu,
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Tel 81-952-24-2111 FAX 81-952-25-0753
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