

Rabbit killings breed distrust of animal raising

Ibaraki Prefecture begins to address shortcomings in the raising of animals at elementary schools by having volunteer veterinarians teach special classes.

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From around spring this year, killings of rabbits being raised in elementary schools have occurred one after the other throughout the nation. Within Ibaraki Prefecture, 25 rabbits were killed at three schools.

Organizations for preventing cruelty to animals are also starting to ask schools to stop raising small animals because of inadequate knowledge in animal-rearing and insufficient funds. Consequently, some schools in other prefectures are considering a halt to the practice.

"Please, let me touch it!" During the recess after the second-hour class, pupils crowded around the rabbit cage at the Tokiwa Elementary School in Mito City. The children whose turn it was to care for the rabbits happily entered the cage and fed cabbage to the baby rabbits pushed aside by the adult rabbits.

At the Tokiwa Elementary School, there were two cases of rabbits being killed in 1995. They apparently were bitten to death by dogs, but there is also the possibility that human beings set the dogs on the rabbits. A similar incident occurred five years ago, but no one called for suspension of raising rabbits.

Mitsuyoshi Nakamura, a teacher at the school, said, "I don't think

plies and PTA funds to cover the cost of raising the animals.

At the end of August, the Japan Anti-Vivisection Association (JAVA) of Tokyo sent a written request, to boards of education throughout the nation, and to schools where animals have been killed, asking for the raising of animals in schools to be suspended.

Hiromi Kamekura of the JAVA secretariat pointed out, "Animals are continuing to be raised in schools without adequate knowledge by teachers and without appropriate funding. Such a method of

raising will make the animals unhappy and will impart mistaken knowledge to children."

The Shiroy Daihan Elementary School in Shiroy Town, Chiba Prefecture, where 15 rabbits were killed in August this year, answered the JAVA written request with the statement, "We are studying whether to abolish the raising of rabbits."

Principal Toshio Takahashi said, "When we consider the prospect of a five-day school week, it may be better to select animals which can be raised indoors, such as hamsters and guinea pigs."

On the other hand, the Ibaraki Prefectural Board of Education's answer to the JAVA request was, "The role played by raising animals at school is very significant, and we intend to expand such activities in the future." But it added that there is no special budgetary appropriation for the raising of animals.

From nine years ago the prefectural government's Environmental Health Division has been holding "animal contact classes" at about 50 primary schools each year. With the cooperation of practicing veterinarians, the classes teach children and teachers the correct way to raise rabbits and dogs. Animals being raised by the schools also receive health checks and treatment. The aim of the classes is not only to impart knowledge to children and teachers, but to deepen ties with nearby veterinarians.

The Environmental Health Division points out, "We accept that budgetary steps have not been adopted despite the good educational effects of raising animals, and that it is difficult for schools to go to veterinary hospitals. It would be good if the animal contact classes could help to create a network."

An increasing number of schools are having their animals examined by volunteer veterinarians every year or are visiting veterinary hospitals for instruction.

Veterinarian Masao Hiki, who is chairman of the prevention guidance committee of the prefectural Animal Administration Center, said, "There must be many hospitals which want to cooperate as a link in the regional education chain. We want the schools to feel free to consult us."

The Tokiwa Elementary School in Mito City recently had a rabbit with a broken bone treated for free at a nearby hospital. Teacher Nakamura said, "If we had the budget, we could have the rabbits examined frequently. We would be grateful if the admin-



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