

Stricter laws against animal abuse sought

Yomiuri Shimbun

Animal lovers and citizens groups are calling for toughening of a law concerning the protection and control of animals following a recent series of animal abuse incidents.

The cases include a pigeon whose neck was pierced with a pushpin, a puppy whose eyes were glued shut and a wild duck that was impaled by an arrow.

Widely known as the Animal Protection Law, the law is vague and even lacks a clear definition of the word "abuse," legal experts said.

Moreover, it does not impose heavy penalties on people who abuse or abandon animals—offenders face a maximum fine of ¥30,000.

The law was enacted in October 1973, but has not been widely applied.

Rather, animal abusers have often been charged under the Penal Code with destruction of property.

Last year, the National Policy Agency reported five incidents of animal abuse, resulting in a total of 14 people being charged with violations of the Penal Code or the Waste Disposal Law.

Only three of the cases were sent to prosecutors, police said.

In the end, prosecutors decided not to indict two of the three, and only one suspect was fined ¥30,000, according to police.

Citizens groups have voiced concern that police and prosecutors overlooked what could have been portents of more brutal crimes.

In the United States and European countries relatively strict penalties are imposed on those convicted of abusing animals.

A Tokyo group working for revision of the law cited the following cases:

- A person in Britain who abandoned a dog and a cat when moving to a new home was sentenced to three months in prison and banned from keeping an animal for 10 years.

- A person in Britain who set a pet dog on fire was ordered to perform 60 hours of community service and banned from keeping any animal for five years.

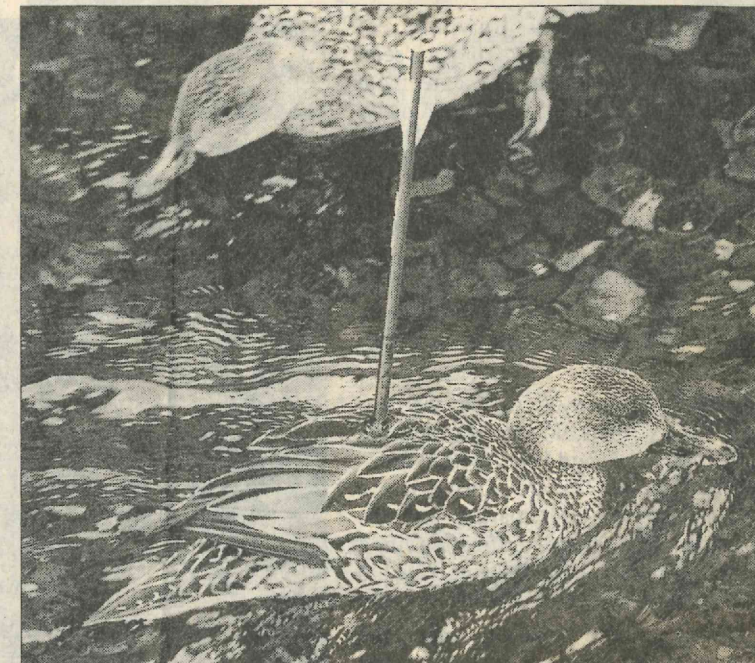
- A person in Australia who drowned a dog in a bucket of water was sentenced to three months in prison.

- A person in the United States who starved a dog to death was sentenced to six months in prison.

The Tokyo group—comprising 11 animal lovers' organizations—recently presented its proposed revisions to the



Above, a pigeon whose neck was pierced with a pushpin; right, a wild duck impaled by an arrow



ruling Liberal Democratic Party, saying changes in the law are necessary to protect animals, which cannot speak for themselves.

One principle of the proposal reads: "Animal life should be treated with the same respect as human life."

The proposal specifically defines abuse as:

- Deliberately inflicting physical or mental pain on animals.

- Keeping animals in ways that do not suit their habits or living patterns.

- Making animals fight each other.

The proposal also calls for giving offenders prison terms of up to three years or fining them up to ¥300,000.

The LDP said it aims to work with other parties to submit a bill to the Diet for the revisions.

Hurdles remain

"How do we deal with jockeys whipping their horses during a race?" asked an official of a section of the Prime Minister's Office in charge of the protection and control of animals.

As this example shows, there are hurdles that must be

overcome before the law can be revised, the official said.

"It is necessary for stronger penalties to be imposed (on those who abuse animals,)" said Prof. Masumi Yoshida of Doshisha University.

"However, the law should be carefully revised in accordance with what is actually happening in society," said Yoshida, who is also the representative of a group of legal experts specializing in law concerning pets.

Moves toward revision were primarily spurred on by a murder in Kobe last year in which a middle school boy beheaded a primary school boy.

It was reported that the perpetrator killed small animals prior to the murder.

"Children abuse animals—which are smaller and weaker than them—as they get irritated by high school or university entrance examinations or various demands from adults," said Moeko Tawara, a social commentator.

"I can appreciate steps toward revision of the law," Tawara said. "But more than anything, it is important that adults make an effort to offer children a place or opportunity to release their stress."