

Ann F.

# Holding prisoners of a different str



## Our Planet Earth

STEPHEN HESSE

Ministry bureaucrats are not the only administrators Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto is being called upon to shake up and dress down these days. While Japanese citizens may be the unwitting pawns of oligarchic ministries and corporate profiteers, another class of Japanese inhabitants is suffering forced detention in silence.

These are the inmates of Japan's zoos, being held under consistently poor conditions nationwide: tiny cages for swift-footed carnivores; concrete for all, from ceiling to floor. No room to move, no place to hide, nothing to do but pace, sprawl or self-mutilate — all signs of chronic suffering.

Of course, not everyone in Japan approves of these conditions, but to one animal-rights group the situation is unconscionable. "The fact that we tolerate the exposure of wild animals which are symbols of nature, to public view in such stark and miserable prisonlike conditions shows how far mainstream Japanese society still is from establishing a mature relationship with nature and life," says Fusako Nogami, president of ALIVE (All Life in a Viable Environment).

In an effort to focus attention on these abysmal conditions, ALIVE invited Dr. John Gripper, a British wildlife veterinarian and zoo inspector for the British government, to visit zoos across Japan. The result of his survey is a brief, concise and quite appalling report.

Gripper's report evaluates conditions at 10 Japanese zoos based on a number of criteria, including safety and security, welfare and behavior. In the wake of Gripper's findings, several groups have petitioned Prime Minister Hashimoto, requesting that he take action concerning the conditions in the nation's zoos.

In compiling his report, Gripper applied standards from the U.K. Licensing Act for zoos, and of 10 zoos visited, "only three attained the necessary standard." Those three, acceptable "subject to

dations," were the Japan Monkey Center in Inuyama, Tennoji Zoo in Osaka and Ueno Zoo in Tokyo.

Elsewhere, shortcomings and abuses were prevalent, and ALIVE has called for officials to close down four particularly egregious offenders. The four are Odawara Zoo in Kanagawa Prefecture, Pet Land Himeji in Hyogo Prefecture, Shiratori Animal Land in Kagawa Prefecture, and a small, private zoo in Ono City, operated by Shokai Yoshikawa, a wild-animal dealer.

Conditions at these four ranged from poor to obscene. According to Gripper's report, Odawara "is a very poor collection of animals in unsuitable conditions and closure is the best long-term plan for this zoo."

The comments on Pet Land Himeji were equally brief and sharp: "The conditions that the animals were kept in were quite disgraceful and would have been the subject of a cruelty charge before courts in the U.K. This zoo should be closed forthwith and the owners banned from trading in animals."

Concerning Shiratori Animal Land, Gripper wrote, "This zoo should be closed. Yoshikawa should not be allowed to continue to trade in wild animals." And, finally, regarding Yoshikawa's "dealership" in Osaka Prefecture, Gripper reported: "Conditions that the animals were kept in at this dealer were very bad and totally unacceptable for the keeping of wild animals. Legislation should be introduced for all

wild-animal dealers to be subject to inspection and only registered if they can provide proper facilities."

Gripper completed his survey last summer with support from ALIVE and the Born Free Foundation, a British NGO established by Virginia McKenna (the former actress who starred in the film "Born Free"). In September, McKenna visited herself to stress her concern. What she saw in Japan shocked her.

During her stay, McKenna wrote an emotional letter to

that some of the sight had seen had brought tears. "One small concrete cage held a pride and motionless polar majestic creature of tundra ice almost unrecognized because of its brown an coat. It had no water

"The second cage had hippopotamuses, and Africa's rivers which land at night to feed had no water at all. questioned, the own Shiratori Animal Land he sprayed water from at these animals three day and that that enough."

In the foreword to Gripper's report, McKenna also said to Japan to toughen its "Laws to prevent such thing must either be enforced, or, if necessary, create she wrote.

ALIVE's Nogami has petitioned Prime Minister Hashimoto. "The biggest reason that the current situation has arisen is the present Law Concerning Animal Protection and Control (1973, Law No. 105) gives authorities no legal power to enforce even basic protection or welfare measures," she wrote.

This, she continues, clearly demonstrates the contrast between Japanese animal-welfare legislation that of most European and North American countries.

Perhaps in 1973 the law was progressive; today it is barracking. "Be Kind to Animals Week" gets top billing, but until 1973 are penalties mentioned fine of "not more than ¥30,000 for treating a cruelly. That zoos and can earn 100 times amount selling an makes the penalty laugh. That the law is not enforced makes it ludicrous.

With zoos setting the standard for animal care country, it's no wonder many families keep their dogs on cruelly short leashes and, while the same spend hour after hour tending and pacing, no one seems to think anything is amiss. Indeed, given Japan's miserable state of zoos, it's surprising that animals ground zero in Japan's tuned hierarchy of bul

For more information, contact tel. (03) 3818-1391, or 2010, 2002