

Cat lovers pounce on pet thieves

NIK 5/3/90

MAINICHI SHIMBUN

NISHINOMIYA, Hyogo — Taking the law of the jungle into their own hands, a group of animal lovers on early Tuesday morning spotted and ambushed two alleged pet thieves who are believed to be behind a recent spate of catnappings in the area.

The drama of the capture began around 8 p.m. Monday when a Nishinomiya woman found her two cats, Ramica and Shiro, in traps that had been set near her home.

She contacted fellow cat lovers and they began staking out the traps in order to catch the thieves.

Their persistence paid off around 1 a.m. Tuesday morning, when a truck approached the site and stopped. When they spotted a pair of men in a truck, one of the animal lovers, Natsuki Hirokawa, emerged from his hiding place to ask them if they were the thieves.

In the meantime, the group had notified the police, who rushed to the scene and took the two men away for ques-

tioning.

Police said later that several animal traps had been found in the truck.

The number of missing pets in Osaka and Hyogo prefectures has risen sharply in recent months, according to a Kyoto-based animal rights group called Dobutsu to Rentaisuru-kai.

"We believe the thieves catch the cats to sell them," said Hirokawa, who heads the group. "We intend to intensify our monitoring of the situation to protect them." The group suspects the felines are being sold to labs for medical experiments.

Though the two men are being questioned on suspicion of theft, police are in a bit of a quandry as there are no laws or ordinances governing cat theft in Japan. Compounding the problem is the fact that cats — most anyway — cannot speak up to identify their abductors.

The group is seeking more information on missing pets. If you have any information call or fax the group at (075) 591-8877.



Mainichi Shiro

A woman comforts Ramica, one of the cats rescued by a group of pet lovers.