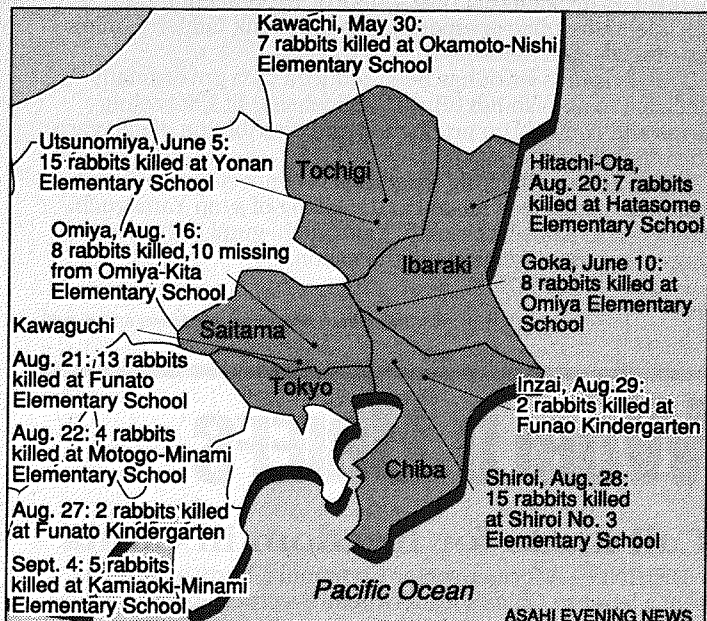


Pet rabbits in peril



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Butchered pets strike fear in Kanto region

By TARO KARASAKI

Asahi Evening News

School principal Shigeru Hagihara said he wanted to teach students about morality and responsibility when he let a second-grade class keep pet rabbits at Motogo Minami Elementary School in Kawaguchi, Saitama Prefecture.

Ironically, the lesson turned into horror last month when dogs killed four of the children's five rabbits in a pen that apparently had been pried open by the owner of the dogs.

It was one in a recent string of attacks on school pets that has fueled fears in the Kanto area. Many have taken these attacks as a warning signs that their children could be the next targets.

On the morning of Aug. 22, the school's custodian in Kawaguchi woke up to the sound of barking dogs. When he entered the schoolyard, he saw two large black dogs growling outside the rabbit cage. Two other dogs were inside the pen. The custodian managed to scare off the animals.

The dead rabbits were bitten in the neck.

"It appears as if someone had pried open the fence," said Hagihara, looking at the snarled wire of the empty cage.

"The children are clearly shocked," he said last week, just after delivering a speech to schoolchildren returning from summer vacation. He said the 89 students were "eerily

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