

CHANGING JAPAN

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 you can teach the warmth of living things with words. Children delight in taking care of the rabbits, and we want to continue raising rabbits in the future."

At the Hatasome Elementary School in Hitachiota City, which had all of its seven rabbits killed in August this year, rabbits received from a nearby elementary school are being raised again. Papers on four students of a local junior high school as the suspected rabbit killers were sent to the public prosecutor's office in October, but the four were not graduates of the Hatasome Elementary School.

Hatasome Elementary School Principal Saburo Haginiwa said, "They probably couldn't have killed the rabbits if they had raised the rabbits themselves."

In the Education Ministry's curriculum guidelines, there is the exhortation to "Raise animals so that the children will take good care of living things," but it is left up to the school whether it will raise animals or not.

There is no concrete guideline for raising animals, and schools must find their own funds to take care of the animals. According to the Ibaraki Prefectural Office of Education, the schools within the prefecture are using funds for expendable sup-

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 Daisan 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."



Pupils take care of rabbits during a recess at the Tokiwa Elementary School in Mito City.

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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 administration would accord greater importance to the raising of animals."

Tsukuba Convention Center to



An artist's concept of Tsukuba International Convention Center.

Tsukuba City, located in the southwestern part of Ibaraki Prefecture and about 50 kilometers north of Tokyo, is the nation's largest research and development center.

About 300 laboratories, research institutes and educational facilities dot the landscape, employing more than 13,000 researchers in a variety of fields.

Tsukuba is also a cosmopolitan town

these meetings were necessarily small scale because spacious convention halls were not available.

Local people and others concerned therefore started calling for a convention hall to be constructed which had a large enough capacity to handle international conferences.

In response, the Ibaraki Prefectural Government and the Japan Science and