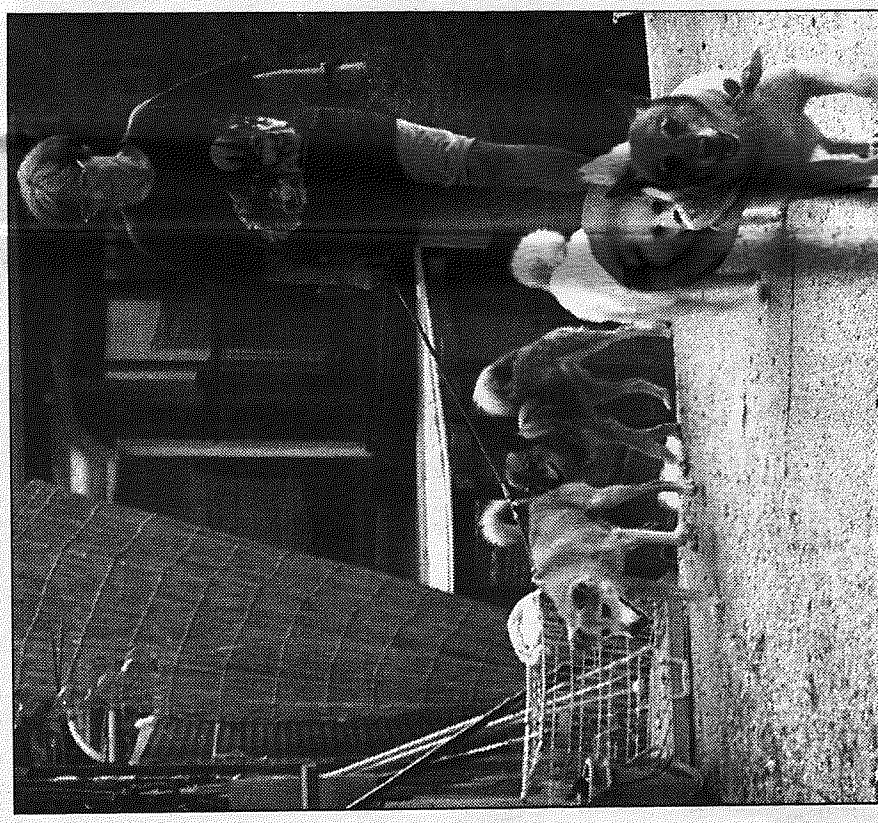


Another group, the Tokyo-based Citizens Conference for Consideration of Nature and Animals, is collecting signatures to petition the government to strengthen the law's provisions.

Spokeswoman Yoko Shimizu said the group had already gathered about 190,000 signatures, close to its target of at least 200,000.

Diet members whom the group has contacted are showing increasing interest, even those belonging to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Shimizu said. The recent Kobe murder incident, as well as past reports that Tsutomu Miyazaki—who is appealing a death sentence handed down earlier this year for the serial murders of four young girls in 1988 and 1989 in Tokyo and Saitama Prefecture—had also killed dogs and cats before he committed the crimes, has apparently convinced some lawmakers

that the lack of an established animal welfare system in Japan made it difficult to take care of all the animals in need. In the West, she added, most communities have five or six animal shelters, and people who find abandoned animals have a number of alternatives when one is full and they themselves are unwilling or unable to take care of the animal. However, she said in Japan there are no other shelters in the Kansai region where people



Hagiwara said a study by JAVA found that in Britain a similar case would have been treated by police as abuse of animals, and the perpetrator would have been liable to a maximum penalty of £5,000, roughly 1 million yen, or up to six months in prison.

In addition to a stronger law, ARK's Oliver said she would also like to see a more extensive network of animal shelters to care for homeless dogs and cats.

She said the lack of an established animal welfare system in Japan made it difficult to take care of all the animals in need. In the West, she added, most communities have five or six animal shelters, and people who find abandoned animals have a number of alternatives when one is full and they themselves are unwilling or unable to take care of the animal. However, she said in Japan there are no other shelters in the Kansai region where people

could take the animals, since ARK is at full capacity now.

"In Japan, it's either take the animal to the *hokenjo* (public health center) or throw the animal away," she said. "There is nothing in between. So, of course, people will contact us. The more publicity we get, the more people think this is a place they can take their animals."

She said ARK gets about 15 calls daily involving such cases and these people have to be told that with 300 animals in ARK's care there is no more room.

"For every one animal we take, there are thousands that need help, but we have limitations of space and people," she said.

"That's the same as sanctuaries everywhere in the world."

A study in 1996 by JAVA also points to the fact that dogs and cats taken to the public health centers were more often put to death than placed in a new home or returned to their owners.

A survey of all prefectures and cities that were responsible for compiling statistics on the number of dogs and cats captured or brought into the public health centers found that 16,095 dogs were returned to their homes in 1995 while another 10,758 were adopted. A total of 414,506 dogs were killed.

In the same year, of the 313,812 cats brought in to public health centers, only 51 were returned home. Another 1,605 were adopted and a total of 307,626 cats were killed.

A report by ARK made a dramatic contrast to the situation in Britain where of the stray dogs taken in by wardens between 1993 and 1995, about 20 percent were returned directly to the owners, an-

One of the dozens of cats looking for a new home at the Animal Refuge Kansai's cat shelter.

ALL PHOTOS BY ROY K. AKAGAWA

The reason for the low percentage of pets that are returned to their owners in Japan is that most owners do not begin seriously looking for lost pets until a few days have elapsed, said JAVA's Hagiwara. In that time, the animals may have been picked up by the local authorities and taken to the pound where they are likely to be killed in a short period of time.

Tags little help in being found

Hagiwara also said the poor quality of the license tags given to dog owners who register their pets at local city offices is another reason owners are not readily notified that their pets have been picked up. She said that since the licenses are likely to be damaged and lost after the dog has been outside for a while, many owners simply remove the licenses as a precaution.

Oliver added that better identification of pets, including eventually implanting microchips into the animals, would not only ensure that pet owners would be able to locate their pets should they roam from home, but would also allow the authorities to track down irresponsible owners who simply abandoned the animals.

ARK now takes care of about 300 animals, which is about double the number that was being taken care of prior to the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. After the earthquake, the ARK complex was flooded with animals from owners who lost their homes and, at one time, as many as 600 animals were being cared for, Oliver said.

ARK tries to take in only really bad cases, including animals that have been abused or injured. There are many calls from pet

pets, but occasionally her group is forced to care for animals that are abandoned outside the ARK complex during the middle of the night.

In the past two or three years, there have been more cases of people having to give up their pets because of a move to smaller quarters due to financial reasons, she said. Oliver thought these cases were a result of the bursting of the asset-inflated bubble economy.

Another common case of referrals to ARK is people who find abandoned animals but are unable to look after the rescued animal themselves. These people turn around and call ARK to ask that it take care of the animal. Oliver tries to convince these people to take care of the animal themselves or to look for another home for it.

While Oliver said finding new homes for the animals in the care of ARK was an important task, she added that it was difficult to find new homes for most of the animals because most people prefer puppies or kittens rather than adult pets.

This tendency to prefer young animals, as well as purebred dogs and cats as opposed to mongrels, also points to a difference in pet ownership between Japan and the West.

Oliver said that it was common for families in Britain to find their pets in animal shelters. In Japan, many potential pet owners go to pet shops where they spend large amounts of money for whatever purebred dog happens to be in fashion, she said.

"People just do not seem to think very much before they get an animal," she said. "They buy very much on impulse and they don't consider how much space and time it will take."