

ARK rescues animals in Kansai

Briton finds responsible homes for hundreds of strays

By ANGELA JEFFS

There is a common misconception that the British affection for their pets is rooted in a deep sloppy sentimentality. Not so, believes Elizabeth Oliver, who in 1990, after taking in abandoned and abused animals for over a decade, founded Animal Rescue Kansai, or ARK, near Osaka.

"It was Mahatma Gandhi who said that a nation can be judged whether civilized or not by the way it treats its animals," she observed in late May on a rare visit to Tokyo for a week of networking with similarly motivated organizations. "We British aren't sentimental about animals. Rather, we respect them."

Japan, she says, still has a long way to go before it understands that animals have rights too. There is a lot of ignorance and confusion, exemplified by the way a fashionable breed is pampered inside the house, while a Shiba or mixed breed remains chained outside as a guard dog.

Oliver, who as a child enjoyed a rural middle-class upbringing in Jersey in the Channel Islands surrounded by cats, dogs and ponies, was staying at Asian Kaikan in Akasaka. Her brother, John, who lives in Melbourne, Australia, was also along for the ride, to see a daughter working in the JET program and to advise his sister in what he termed "resource manage-



ELIZABETH OLIVER, founder of Animal Rescue Kansai, hopes to see stronger laws preventing cruelty to animals and strict control of pet shops and breeders. ANGELA JEFFS PHOTO

north to Japan, she remembered a Japanese doctor in London (a rarity in the 1960s) giving her his name card, with an address in Kansai.

tress.

It took three years to find a suitable plot of land for Oliver's refuge. Japanese landowners tend to sell only when

precedence. Others were tied outside evacuation centers, in which case ARK offered to care for them until owners could make plans.

"At the height of the emergency we had 600 animals," she revealed. "We never refused a single one, never thought about where we were going to put them. People were amazing; they just flocked to help. With my kitchen a clinic, we lived on cup noodles. There were sleeping bags all over the place, with 20-30 volunteers bedding down every night."

The official emergency animal facility at Sanda closed in late 1995. The other, run by JAWS and Kobe, closed in March last year. One had spent ¥80 million only weeks before. Yet ARK has never received a yen from the government. "Nor a word of thanks!" Oliver added tartly.

In 1995, she traveled with a group from Japan to a conference in Geneva concerned with the therapeutic use of animals in society. Last year she was in Budapest at an international animal welfare conference. With West and East European nations well represented, one so advanced, the other wondering how to catch up fast, it proved the more practical learning experience with regard to Japan.

Following the system of animal welfare in the