

Real, practical kindness needed for Japan's pets

By RENATE HEROLD

Every year, millions of yen are spent by local governments here and there in Japan on the "Dobutsu Aigo Shukan (Be Kind to Animals Week)" in September, during which festivities styled to create a superficial public interest in pets are held.

In everyday life, however, kindness to animals is limited: In 1991 alone, Animal Administration Authorities (eun-

phemistically named animal love, welfare or protection centers) nationwide put down 396,860 stray or abandoned dogs and 333,457 abandoned cats.

The fate of another 60,330 animals taken in by the facilities was even worse; they were given away for vivisection either free of charge or for a nominal fee. In total, 11 percent of the registered dog population were destroyed.

Obviously, pets are a cheap commodity. The abandoned, including many purebreds, are all killed within a few days. Three quarters or more of the death candidates are kittens and puppies. Although Paragraph 9 of the Animal Protection and Administration Law states that owners must avoid purposeless breeding, many pet owners neither know this nor care. Often enough, the authorities fail to admonish even those who bring in several litters a year.

In this way, the taxpayer is made to finance the killing of the innocent, bred by ignorant and irresponsible owners. With more neutering, the litters would not be there in the first place and the AAA could use their budget and facilities to shelter adult animals and find new homes for them, thus living up to their noble name.

Actually, Paragraph 7 of the law says that the AAA has to accept any dog or cat if requested by the owner, but it does not stipulate that these animals must be killed. It would be adequate to follow the spirit of the law to give them shelter and protection.

That this can be realized has been shown by precedents in recent years brought about by the effort of future-oriented animal protection groups such as Dobutsutachi no Kai of Hino City in Tokyo. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government in two cases sheltered, neutered and found homes for numbers of abandoned and mistreated animals whose owners had either fled or had been arrested.

Kanagawa Prefecture act-

ed similarly in three cases and has recently adopted a system of training adult dogs for life at new homes, whereas previously all adult animals had been put down as a matter of course.

Urged by Dobutsutachi no Kai and encouraged by the example of administrations in the Kanto area, Nara Prefecture earlier this month set up temporary kennels and rescued survivors of the "Tenri hellhole," a small lot where dozens of sick and starving dogs were kept next to piles of rotting carcasses by their owner/torturer.

Animal Refuge Kansai, a local group, also launched an effective international letter-writing campaign about this case. The dogs will now receive medical treatment, be neutered and found new homes. It is hoped that this example will improve the attitude of administrations in the Kansai area.

Although the situation in Tokyo still needs to improve greatly, in Japan, animal administration is most advanced in the capital.

Of the 23 Tokyo wards, 19 offer a spaying subsidy, with Bunkyo Ward even subsidizing the spaying of stray cats. Of course credit for introducing the system does not belong to wise administrators alone — they usually could not care less — but to concerned citizen's combined efforts and petitions.

Many towns and cities belonging to Tokyo also have spaying subsidy systems and the idea is spreading to other places in Japan where tax money is as yet rarely used

for animal welfare in its true sense.

The pessimistic views and negative attitudes of most of the established animal welfare organizations so far have done little to solve animal problems: Most of these groups simply advocate euthanasia, with the Hanshin branch of the Japan Animal Welfare Society (JAWS) killing pets in place of the AAA by the thousands each year.

If neutering instead is given priority — as it was by many citizens' groups which sprang up in and around Tokyo in particular — good results can be seen, such as the yearly decrease of AAA intake of abandoned animals in Tokyo.

In 1989, the Ogasawara Islanders in Tokyo were planning to poison stray cats which were feeding on rare birds, the latter being a tourist attraction. Citizens' groups intervened to stop this plan and sent three veterinarians to the islands who neutered a total of 173, thus solving the problem in a constructive way.

When similar plans for cat-killing became public at Teurito Island off Hokkaido last year, Hokkaido authorities could have been moved to follow Ogasawara's precedent of prohibiting the killing and spaying the strays.

Knowledge of the law and the dedication to convince the authorities are needed to bring about changes in the treatment of animals — it is easy if you try!

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