

ENVIRONMENT/LEISURE

Japanese pet abuse must be prevented

Wild Watch

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Regular readers know that while I try to make this column easy natural history reading, even escapist literature for city dwellers if you prefer that description, there are occasions when certain wildlife or environmental issues are just too serious for me to keep quiet about them any longer.

Some of you may remember previous columns on bear farming in Hokkaido and on the plight of other animals in Japan. Well, one more such topic was brought to my attention recently when I received a clipping from a British newspaper. It brought back memories of a conversation I had only last August in east Hokkaido when a local veterinarian asked me whether I could help him to buy a pedigreed dog if he visited England.

An innocent request you might imagine — but then do you know anything about the fate of a frighteningly large number of pets in Japan? Most people don't. Even Japanese journalists at last month's international Crufts Dog Show were unaware of the situation in Japan, and what is more were reluctant to believe the evidence.

And of course many breeders in Europe and America, offered very large sums for well-bred animals, don't. Unfortunately, because of the prices, they even presume that their animals must be going to very good homes. Perhaps some of them do, but only some. The clipping I had been sent was about this very subject. The headline to the full-page article reads, "Animal welfare in a callous land" and the even more damning

cally, enforcement where there seems to be no basic concern to take care of other life, is a major problem.

JAWS, however, offers advice to pet owners on care and treatment and is involved in the training of young vets as inspectors with the ultimate aim of having a nationwide corps of inspectors for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout Japan. Educating pet owners in their attitudes to their animals may well have an add-on effect for the way in which people also think of wild creatures and

to Our Dogs reported on a survey which placed Japan at "the top of the cruelty league," while the Kennel Club warned that "the documentary evidence of neglect, cruelty and indifference to canine suffering is quite substantial and must give rise to concern." There seems little concern to hasten a change.

The public, if they notice the "throwouts," seem to see them merely as an inconvenience. They may see the distress of starvation, or the agony of maiming in accidents, but don't see themselves as

with which fashions can sweep Japan means that suddenly popular breeds can be rented out for the day or the week, earning large sums for their owners. The demand for rare breeds from abroad is particularly strong, and the import of the larger, more aggressive breeds should be cause for grave concern because of the serious injuries they could inflict.

Of course, after the boom is over, the once lucrative pet is as likely just to be dumped. In some areas these abandoned dogs survive to eke out a living from the land, and in the open farmland of Hokkaido one even encounters packs of "wild" dogs roaming. These must present a serious risk to cattle, not to mention children.

This is not a pleasant subject I admit, but it is one that people who care for animals of any kind should be aware of. Be very suspicious of any request to assist with the purchase of animals from abroad, especially from America, where it seems the public has been exposed to very little news of conditions for pets in Japan.

Though the high prices can be seductive, never help anyone import animals into Japan — there are far too many already being dumped and abandoned. If you must have a pet, please consider rescuing one of the forlorn creatures at the local pound which urgently require a home to save their lives, and do consider having your pet sterilized to avoid the stress and misery of their potentially abandoned offspring.

Finally, if you are a concerned animal lover and want to learn more of or support the work of the Japan Animal Welfare Society, then please contact JAWS, No. 5 Tanizawa Building, 1-38 Moto Azabu 2-chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo

The role of JAWS goes beyond just helping abandoned pets. It also offers advice to pet owners on care.

how they look after them when they are in captivity. The growing international concern is not just about the physical mistreatment of animals in Japan, but also how the animals are affected psychologically. Pet owners here seem unaware that dogs are social animals. In breeding dogs as pets, the human owner has replaced other members of the pack and must therefore supply the necessary affection and contact otherwise gained as a member of such a pack.

JAWS maintains rescue centers and small minicenters around the country. You may begin to wonder where the funding comes from in a country not renowned for its understanding of the concept of charity. Well, another amazing fact is that a lot of the funding comes from overseas. Despite Japan's powerful economy, it can't spare the funds to look after its own animals properly. Others are footing the bill.

You may wonder what all the fuss is about, but think about where you have seen

needing to be involved. There are, after all, the responsible authorities.

Sadly these very authorities don't seem too concerned either. While showplace facilities exist, many pounds hold animals, pedigreed and mongrel alike, which are being treated like vermin with cruelty and brutality.

Would you like to spend your final days in darkness in a second basement without bedding or heating, and where food and water are given only irregularly or not at all? Thanks to bureaucracy, all dogs must be kept for at least three days, even when severe illness or injury would be grounds for humane killing before that time under other circumstances. Such animals are put through extra unnecessary suffering.

While sterilization is seen by many as "interfering with nature," breeding pets in the first place is in fact no more natural. Man has taken the responsibility for that. He must also take the consequent responsibility to look after the animals he breeds or allows