

Jaws bares its teeth in attack on Japan for cruelty to dogs

Barry Hugill

FEARS about the fate of dogs exported to Japan are blighting the diamond jubilee of one of Britain's best-loved charities — the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

The association last week proudly announced the world's first guide dog chair of canine medicine and surgery, at London University's Royal Veterinary College. A professor, to be appointed later this year, will join three other academics researching aspects of canine life, including guide dog stress.

This has given new impetus to a long-running dispute among animal lovers over the Japanese treatment of dogs. About a dozen trained guide dogs have been exported to Japan by the association, despite hostility from animal rights activists.

The ominously titled and deadly serious Jaws (Japanese Animal Welfare Society), based in London, does not mince words on the subject. A full-page advertisement it placed in a recent edition of *Dog World*, headlined 'Animal Welfare in a Callous Land', described Japan as 'a country with a track record of indifference to suffering in both people and animals' — for every good Japanese there are claimed to be 10 who beat, neglect, starve or, in some cases, administer electric shocks to man's best friend.

Jaws accepts that guide dogs sent to Japan are probably well treated by Japanese standards. But it is concerned about what

will happen when the dogs get old, and about the fate of their offspring.

Andrew Laird, who runs the Jaws office, says the Japanese are particularly fond of British puppies or those of British stock.

'They will pay thousands. British breeders are in it for the money and we know that hundreds of dogs are shipped over. But the majority of dogs in Japan suffer.'

To back up its case, Jaws cites a recent advertisement in the Tokyo Animal Welfare Hospital that offered to cut dogs' ears to make them stand up straight, and to remove their voice boxes to stop them barking.

Criticism of the Japanese is not confined to Jaws. The RSPCA has accused them of 'an extraordinary disregard for the well-being of their animals'. This largely stems from the belief common in Japan that animals are incapable of feeling.

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association insists that it made vigorous checks before allowing the export of dogs. Last November it sent two officials to investigate. They found that the two guide dog training schools supplied with animals were of a high standard. The British dogs were 'healthy and well-fed, friendly and willing to work'.

Alison Radevsky, an association spokeswoman, said it 'felt relaxed' about the fate of the dogs. 'Of course conditions in Japan are different, but we are totally satisfied about the welfare of these dogs.'