

Stray dogs seen as growing th

Abandoned pets roaming in packs in Kansai mountain

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OSAKA — A group of researchers at Hokkaido University is calling for coordinated action by Osaka, Nara and Kyoto prefectures to cope with a growing problem of stray dogs.

The local governments currently have individual measures to deal with the problem, but one area where more than 100 stray dogs are believed concentrated, around Ikoma Mountain, borders on all three prefectures.

The stray dog problem in the area has been of serious concern since a 4-year-old girl was killed by a pack of strays in 1983.

This month, Nobuo Suzuki, a Hokkaido University assistant professor, completed a field study on stray and house dogs at the northern part of the Ikoma Mountain area in cooperation with other researchers and students.

Suzuki, a behavioral scientist specializing in wolves, appeared as a witness when the girl's parents filed a lawsuit against Osaka Prefecture for its failure to deal with the stray dogs.

He learned during the trial that even canine experts, such as public health officials, do not have specialized knowledge on the behavior of stray dogs.

Suzuki's research team monitored the activities of three stray dogs over a six-month period in a 16-sq.-km



A STRAY DOG finds a man's affection in an area around Ikoma Mountain, where increasingly the animals, discarded as pets by families, are accumulating in roaming packs. KIMIO IDA PHOTO

area around Ikoma. The team learned there were about 45 to 55 dogs inhabiting the area.

The group said people from outside the region come to the mountains to illegally abandon their dogs. It cited finding 14 such abandoned pet dogs, including adult females, during the study period.

A group member said the females may have been abandoned by owners who want to avoid their pets from mating with strays and becoming

pregnant.

The six-month study showed abandoned dogs often breed with local pets that are outside without being caged or fenced in.

The group confirmed the birth of 20 dogs during the period.

In its study, the group counted a total of 17 pet dogs in six communities in the area. Of them, about half were not kept on leashes, at least during the night. This raises

the chances of their mating with stray dogs.

People in the Kansai region are more prone to allow their dogs to roam freely than citizens in other parts of Japan, Suzuki said.

"Capturing stray dogs is only a superficial measure. It does not solve the basic problem," he said.

Dogs become aggressive and tend to pack together during mating periods, which occur every few months, according to the group.

The danger of strays attacking children will increase in summer when young people play around the moun-