

n as growing threat

in packs in Kansai mountains



affection in an area around Ikoma Mountain, where increasingly by families, are accumulating in roaming packs. KIMIO IDA PHOTO

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-

tains, Suzuki warned.

Such strays can roam in a large area and can come down from the mountains to nearby housing areas, the group said.

Nationwide, there were 11,132 dog-biting attacks in 1988, the government reports. Five of them proved fatal. The figure dropped to 10,777 in 1989 with three deaths and 9,618 in 1990 and no fatalities.

Currently, dog owners are regulated by two laws.

The Rabies Prevention Law, enacted in 1950, requires owners to register their dogs every year and to have the pets inoculated against rabies.

A prefectural ordinance introduced in 1970 requires that dogs be kept on a leash and prohibits abandoning them. A violation is a misdemeanor.

In 1990, 20,797 stray dogs were caught in Osaka Prefecture, compared with 23,476 in 1989.

The number caught has declined over the past three years, according to prefectural officials.

Osaka has several offices to accept unwanted dogs so that they are not simply abandoned in the wild.

"People know that if they take their dogs to these offices, the dogs won't survive. So they abandon their dogs, hoping somebody will pick them up and feed them," Suzuki said.

"On the other hand, local residents take pity on the wandering dogs and occasionally feed them," he said, suggesting that this is one way strays survive.

The group feels such a practice should be stopped to prevent attacks.