

Abandoned dogs on increase



Stray dogs fill cages at an Osaka animal control center.

Owning an animal in Japan has become a profitable venture recently for pet stores and other related companies, providing a major sales boom amid the lingering economic recession.

But if the latest local government statistics throughout the Kansai region are any indication, many pet owners in Japan are in the dog house when it comes to actually taking care of their domesticated darlings.

At least 170,000 dogs are abandoned annually by pet owners in 17 prefectures in western Japan. In Osaka Prefecture alone in fiscal year 1991, 7,317 dogs were brought in to public health centers; 5,376 other strays were picked up from the streets. The dogs were later taken to animal control centers to be put to sleep.

Municipal animal control centers and humane societies

alike are now calling into question the morals of such pet owners and starting to take their own action to stem the rising tide of homeless house pets nationwide.

Following an awakening of a concern for animal rights in local government, according to Hitoshi Sugimoto, a spokesman for the Tokyo-based *Dojutsu-shakai* (Association for Animals). "But what's more important is that local administrative bodies are educating the dog owners themselves."

The Hyogo Prefectural Government, for one, is planning to submit an animal protection bill in February to the prefectural assembly.

Under the proposed ordinance, animal control officials may refuse to accept pet canines from owners who have no good reason for giving up their pets.

"There are far too many owners

out there who are quick to abandon their dogs," said a prefectural spokesman. "They need to keep in mind that the dogs are living creatures too."

The Osaka Prefectural Government, under pressure from animal rights advocates, passed a law in November 1992 to stop the "drug" instead of putting to death hundreds of unwanted dogs brought in to the centers.

Such a policy was commonplace among local governments, but is being continued by only eight prefectures in western Japan.

Nagasaki and Hiroshima prefectures are taking preventive measures to encourage citizens to adopt homeless dogs.

The Osaka, Kyoto and Fukuoka prefectural governments likewise are taking away dogs from owners who are not

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