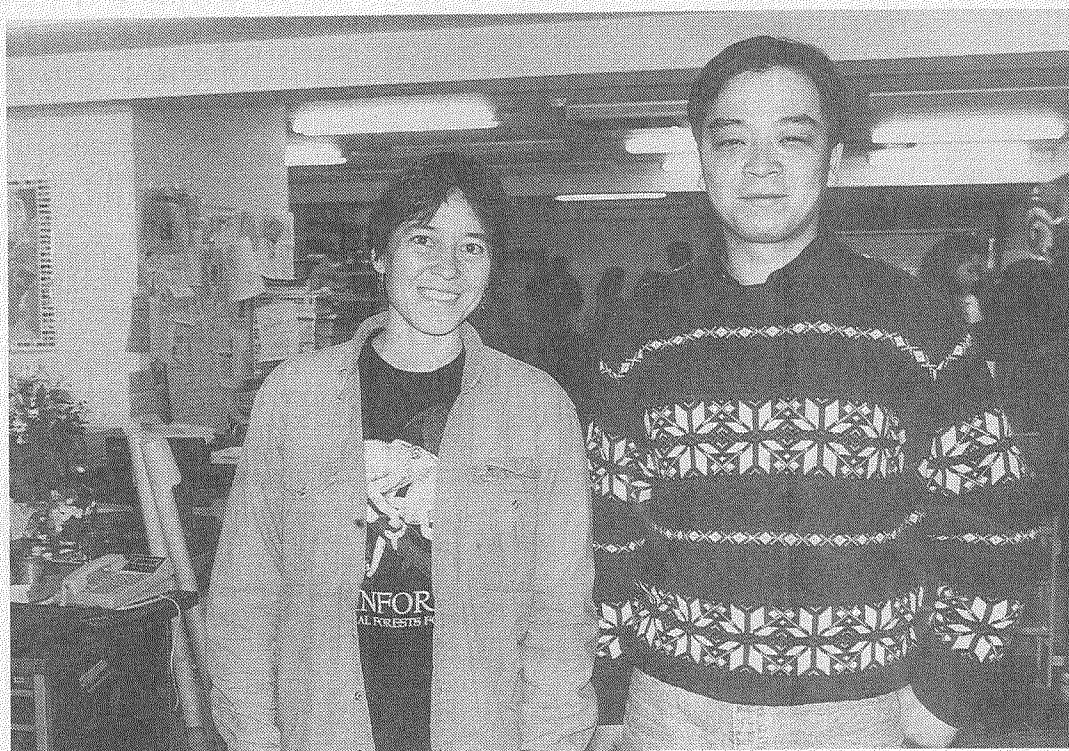


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Planet while making waves



MICHI MATHIAS and Naoki Ohara, of Greenpeace Japan, are busily gearing up for an international conference on the whaling issue to be held May 10 to 14 in Kyoto. ANGELA JEFFS PHOTO

are interviewing to fill four positions, three due to vacancies — accountant, media person and nuclear campaigner—and one new, to handle forests.

"When we advertised in 1991, we had 20 replies. When we ran an ad in The Japan Times again in February, we received more than 100. I think that indicates greater interest and concern as well as a better understanding of our objectives and aims," Ohara said. "Most Japanese who applied had lived or studied abroad. Most spoke English. As for the foreigners, nearly all spoke very good Japanese."

Until the office opened, the Japanese media gave Greenpeace a very hard time, putting out misinformation from the prowhaling lobby and providing a bad image for public consumption. This, Ohara says, has also changed a lot.

trying to do.

The issues given priority by the media are the destruction of the ozone layer and nuclear issues, probably because Japanese journalists grasp these the best. There are also a number of Diet members who are sympathetic, but since the organization's policy remains strongly politically neutral, Ohara would not name them.

"The Environmental Agency?" he considered. "Very weak compared to the Ministry of Trade and Industry. We would like to encourage it to become stronger but we have to walk a delicate line."

People were beginning to drift into the office, many looking as if they had come straight from the airport, which they had. That evening Greenpeace Japan staffers would begin a week of cross-cultural exchange with 14 ac-

tivists from Holland, Canada, Australia, U.K., New Zealand and Indonesia. Discussions would range over many issues, including how to cooperate effectively across national and cultural boundaries.

The prowhaling lobby is very active worldwide at the moment, using statistics to claim whales should be exploited again and ignoring the history of overexploitation and arguments against the present ban. Mind you, says Ohara, that would be a joke here if it wasn't so serious. Despite Japan taking 300 minke whales a year for so-called "research" purposes, whale meat is widely available in most supermarkets, and a well-known restaurant specializing in whale meat operates openly in Shibuya.

"Those 300 whales are either stretching a very long way," Ohara remarked ironi-

cally, or illegal whale meat is being imported into Japan. Some is in fact dolphin meat being sold as whale, which is almost as bad.

"Arguments are focusing on an alleged increase in whale stocks to 760,000. Yet everyone knows that accurate counting is impossible. Even if there are more, with 123 million Japanese reckoning that whale is their traditional diet, how long would they last? The prowhalers are also saying that if whales are banned, fishing in general will be next, which is totally stupid. Whaling is about profit, pure and simple."

Thirty-eight countries will be represented in Kyoto, with Greenpeace's position quite clear. They will fight against any resumption of whaling anywhere in the world and, in fact, will seek tighter rules and definitions.

Naoki Ohara thinks fresh energy is important in an organization like Greenpeace. He believes the movement will need increasingly better-qualified staff in the future, and would even be happy if he could find a replacement for his job, although he will always continue working in the environmental movement.

"Greenpeace Japan can and should play a really important role in preserving the planet. We've been growing and getting stronger over the past four or five years, but there is a long way to go. We hope that more young Japanese with strong, passionate ideas will join us in the future."

Greenpeace Japan, Yoyogikaikan 4F, 1-25-1 Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo. Phone 03-5351-5400; fax 03-5351-5417. Stickers, T-shirts, postcards for sale. Also, the best history of the movement published to date: "The Greenpeace Story," by Michael Brown & John May, published by Dorling Kindersley. Regular annual membership ¥6,000, students ¥3,600.