

Finding Homes for Abandoned Animals

Dear KTO,

Recent issues of KTO have included discussions of the disturbing problem of abandoned pets in Japan. I hope you will consider printing this true story describing our experiences helping to find homes for abandoned animals. Perhaps it will give ideas and encouragement to others who are also disturbed by this problem but have felt unable to do something constructive.

Twice in six months, my husband and I have found, temporarily cared for, and secured homes for a number of abandoned puppies. The first incident occurred during a pleasant Sunday drive on Mt. Ikoma. We stopped to enjoy a lookout and found a filthy box containing seven very young puppies. Many people stopped to look and remark "kawaii" but then simply walked on. A man operating a nearby snack truck seemed intent on staying out of this unpleasant situation. After we persistently asked him how long the puppies had been there, he finally told us that they were there when he arrived early in the morning. They had no water or food; it was 3 p.m. and the sun was blazing hot. The puppies were on the verge of death by dehydration. My husband and I gathered the litter and prepared a makeshift bed for them in our car. Over the next few days we helped them recover from their ordeal. Although, like many Japanese, we live in a 'mansion' apartment that forbids pets, we kept them in a state of secrecy and nursed them back to health, all the time wondering what we should do next.

I spent the first full day with the puppies calling various animal organizations as well as friends for advice. This proved most discouraging. But the next day, my husband came up with the idea of hawking the puppies at a local university campus. Because the puppies were so cute, interest in them was easily generated. With a large sign and a box full of yapping, playful puppies, we soon became the center of attention on campus. In the first two days we found good homes for four puppies,

making sure that those who took them lived in a place that permitted pets, that their parents approved in cases of students, etc. By the end of the week, all seven puppies were in new homes. We've kept track of several of the dogs, who are now big, strong, healthy, happy adolescents, with satisfied owners.

A similar experience occurred in June, when we found ourselves at Mt. Unzen during the tremendous eruptions. Hours after the eruption that claimed 44 human lives, we came across three abandoned puppies near the devastated zone. They were wet, cold and starving; obviously, they had been there some time. We decided to take them with us on the rest of our Kyushu trip, and after food, water, warmth and rest, these guys quickly became very *genki*. When we returned to Kansai, we had them de-wormed for a mere ¥600, and gave them a flea and tick bath to remove external parasites. This time I hawked them at a local train station where hundreds of people were departing from a nearby sports event. The pups all had new homes within a few hours. Follow-up calls later indicated that the new owners were very happy with their new puppies.

Our experience shows that, if one is determined, it is not so difficult to find homes for cute young animals (although abandoned adult animals would probably be a lot more difficult to give away). We are extremely grateful to those friends who helped us and, of course, to those who took the puppies. I hope that this letter might inspire similar efforts by other people who happen to find abandoned pets. Ganbatte!

Leslie Sonnenschein



From Elizabeth Oliver,
Animal Refuge Kansai...

The action of Leslie Sonnenschein and her husband in rescuing abandoned puppies and going to a lot of trouble to find them homes is admirable, but I would advise people to be extremely cautious when giving animals away to strangers. Cute puppies (and kittens) always at-

tract an audience but the people who take them mostly do so on impulse, which is not the best way to take on a responsibility lasting 15 years or more. When the novelty and/or their cuteness wears off, they become another *hokensho* statistic. Finding homes for abandoned animals must be part of an education package to ensure that the cycle isn't repeated.

When stray animals come to ARK we immediately vaccinate them and watch them for 10 days or so to make sure they're healthy before we consider re-homing them. Obviously people wanting a puppy who come here, have already given the matter considerable thought. Before showing them any puppy, we assess, by talking to them at length, what kind of owner they are likely to be, what experience with animals they've had and whether they are able to take on the full responsibility of a pet. We try to match the character of the puppy with the circumstances of the family it's going to (a shy puppy, for example, is likely to become stressed in a family with young kids). Japanese tend to choose by outward appearances only. After they have chosen, we advise about health, the best way to look after their pet and, of course, *neutering*. (All adult animals are automatically neutered before re-homing.) They receive a written explanation as a reminder of these points. In the case of adult animals we personally check their home in advance. More than 20% of people coming here are rejected for various reasons, as potentially unsuitable owners.

Another danger in hawking animals on the street or advertising in newspapers or handing them over to pet shops is that one can be unwittingly prey to unscrupulous pet dealers who make easy money selling puppies and kittens to laboratories for experiments. There is one infamous pet shop in Kyoto which takes in animals for a 'small' fee (about ¥2,000-¥3,000) promising to find 'good' homes, then sells them on to laboratories for a further ¥2,000 (if they are still alive after several days without food and water). The pet shop owner makes money both ways.

Rescuing, in the short term, certainly saves abandoned animals from starvation or being pecked to death by crows, but sometimes their fate in the long term is far worse. The RSPCA have a good slogan we should keep in mind: If you don't want a dog, don't buy (take on) a puppy.

We tell you what you need to know!

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