

Pets In Japan

To the Editor:

The Mainichi has done it again. (Why a Dog's Life is better than a Cat's. June 6th MDN). A bitty article skirting the real social issue, littered with statistical distortions, miscellaneous comments and certainly no help to the millions, yes MILLIONS of animals suffering a "living" hell or dying a miserable death at the hands of the authorities up and down the country.

The Prime Minister's Office through its henchmen the local government authorities and the hokenshos do little or nothing to educate people on a wide scale about care of animals. They insist dogs should be registered and given a rabies shot once a year, but at 4,800 yen per dog many dog owners don't bother. Because more than half the dogs in Japan are unregistered and therefore uninjected due to the high cost, the whole system is rendered ineffective and pointless. If the fee was abolished or at least brought down within the reach of ordinary people's pockets, more would register their dogs. It would also be an ideal opportunity to advise and educate people on animal care. The only advice forthcoming is "Chain your dog at all times," which is why people have to suffer from over-stressed, under or never exercised, lonely canines barking all day.

Spaying is the only way to keep the problem from growing. But again economics are a factor. Instead of going to the expense of sending its extermination squads

all over the country scooping up unwanted animals, why doesn't the Prime Minister's Office launch a spaying campaign and fund it. Most pet owners balk at the 20-30,000 yen it costs to spay their pet let alone the time and transport to and from the vet. Why isn't the registration and rabies fee used for this purpose? Perhaps the Mainichi could get its act together and report on this for a change.

The increase in unwanted cats and kittens this past year is in part due to the popularity of Masanori Hata's film "Koneko no Monogatari." Everyone wants a cute kitten like the one in the film but they are not so keen on the cat it becomes after six months. All Mutsugoro's films portray animals in a happy setting, kittens and puppies romping through meadows or enjoying life with his family. Somehow they breed endlessly. No mention is made however of the way he disposes of the surplus.

No, people have to be taught what having an animal involves — the responsibility, the need to feed, exercise and love it, not for a few weeks but for the length of its life which may span 10 or 15 years. It's not a toy, not an accessory, not a status symbol as many believe but an animal (as we are) with the same needs and feelings. If you aren't prepared to undertake this total responsibility, don't keep a pet.

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