

The area where I live is convenient enough by car for city people to dump their dogs but conveniently too far for the dogs to find their way home. Every week when I drive to Osaka I find abandoned dogs, puppies and kittens on the mountain road; some starving and bewildered, others terrified by their experience. The four dogs I keep now were all found as abandoned pups. Each spring and autumn the local town office puts out strychnine-laced bait to kill these strays many of which become wild in time. This procedure is carried out throughout the rural districts of Japan and the number far exceeds those caught by the dog catchers authorized by the local authorities (hokensho). The sheer number that I have witnessed makes it hard for me to believe that the public authorities have space, time and money ^(other than to) to exterminate them as soon as possible. The 25 days quoted by Mrs Abbott, that dogs undergo quarantine and veterinary inspection, would be economically unfeasible. If the local authorities don't even bother to check if animals are dead before committing the bodies to the incinerator, they would hardly bother to pay a vet to check their health condition. No doubt the Dogs and Cats Home controlled by the Tokyo Metropolitan Council is efficiently run because most of the stray dogs and cats have already been effectively eliminated from Central Tokyo.

I have witnessed the methods used by the 'hokensho' for picking up strays. Wire nooses are pulled tauntly around the neck and the dog swung up and flung into the truck where the rest of the inmates wait terrified. No effort is made to separate puppies and bitches from fierce and big animals. Dogs rescued from the 'hokensho' are scarred, psychologically and emotionally for the rest of their lives.

There is an Animal Protection Law which is encouragingly worded. However it is virtually ineffective and unapplicable. Local authorities including the 'hokensho', city offices and the police are not merely uncooperative but sometimes quite openly hostile when you want their help in locating the owner of a stray. Most of them are totally unaware that such a law exists. The only law they enforce enthusiastically is to make sure people give their dogs rabies shots and keep them on a chain at all times. I have never seen literature in the form of books or posters on being kind to animals, on display in either city offices, veterinary surgeries or schools. If there were, it would go a long way towards changing public attitudes, as Japanese are usually highly responsive to public education programmes.

I hope that ^{like} next time Mrs Abbott comes to Japan she will visit in a private capacity and leave her rose-tinted spectacles at home. If she could travel outside the metropolis to smaller cities and rural areas, I think she would see the other side of the 'dog' world in Japan.

Yours faithfully,

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