

Helping the earthquake's four-legged victims

Tim! - Thanks a lot - It's a great article

Anyone who has been watching NHK or reading the newspapers over the past few weeks will be well aware of both the enormous human suffering caused by the Hanshin earthquake and the widespread destruction of homes, highways and other infrastructure in Kobe and the surrounding area. Not surprisingly, the quake has also been bad news for dogs, cats and other animals, many of whom have survived the initial destruction only to be left to fend for themselves in its chaotic aftermath. However, the situation is not all gloom and doom. Some people are hard at work trying to rescue and care for the earthquake's non-human victims. We asked KTO regular and director of Animal Refuge Kansai (ARK) Elizabeth Oliver what is being done and what more needs to be done to help Kobe's animal refugees.

Can you give the readers a rough idea of the scale of animal suffering in the aftermath of the earthquake?

It's impossible to give precise figures for the numbers of animals affected, but on the basis of the data we have I'd estimate that there are somewhere around 250,000 dogs and 500,000 cats in the Kobe and Hanshinkan areas. Of course, the majority of these are

feral animals, which in the case of dogs, we believe outnumber kept animals by a ratio of three to one. For cats, the ratio is at least five to one and probably greater.

Feral animals survive at normal times and are not the main problem in the wake of the earthquake. Of major concern at this time are the thousands of family pets and other kept animals that have run away from home or have lost their homes and keepers. Many of these animals lack the skills needed to survive on the street or in the woods and have been severely traumatized by their experiences.

These are numbers of kept animals based on registration statistics not feral animals.

What kind of efforts are being made by the authorities and NGOs to ease the plight of the earthquake's non-human victims?

Most of the work is being done by small groups of volunteers. For example, a man in another state who lives near Nishinomizu Ebisu Shrine was one of the first off the mark