

Received from Mutsuo Okada on 1 /29/2005.

REFERENCE: Yomiuri Shimbun (Yomiuri News), p. 38, Tuesday, January 25, 2005

(17th year of Heisei).

Gekigen Dousuru? Akitainu

(A Sharp Decline of The Akita Dog)

Can't Beat The Small Dog Boom

The "Akita dog", which is a natural monument, and the only surviving large Japanese dog is currently in a stage of a sharp decline. Its popularity is being overtaken by the small Japanese dogs.

The Akita dog first became known from the story of the famous faithful dog, Hachikou. Membership in the Akitainu Hozonkai (Akita Dog Preservation Society; Akiho) with its headquarters in the city of Oudate in the prefecture of Akita, where the Akita dog is said to have originated, is also declining.

Akiho was established in 1927 when dog fighting was popular. Just prior to that time, these Akita dogs were being crossbred to western dogs, which lead to a decline in the number of pure Akita dogs. In order to stem this tide, Akiho sought to preserve the pure type Akita dog by creating an Akita dog registry.

According to Akiho, the number of Akita dogs registered reached its height in 1972, when the number of Akita dogs registered exceeded 42,000. In 2004, the registry has shown a sharp decline to only 2,065 dogs.

This is about 1/20th the number when compared to that during the height of its popularity.

Although one should also be aware of the qualifications of the members who are registering these dogs, total membership, which include nationwide consisting of 48 branches with overseas memberships in the United States, the Los Angeles Branch and the Taiwan Branch, have decreased from an approximate total of 14,000 in 1972 to only 2675 members in 2004.

Many of these members are now in the aged group and to walk a dog weighing as much as 30 kilos (66 lb.) may be too strenuous for them. Mr. Hiroshi Matsukawa (age 70), who is the current Secretary of Akiho, says people become very attached to the Akita dog because they are faithful to their masters.

However, because small western dogs are easier to raise inside one's house, they have begun to gain in popularity when compared to that of the Akita dog.

Akiho also holds the Oudate and Shibuya Festival with a parade of Akita dogs every November in Shibuya in Tokyo. Akiho also holds a traditional observance day in the city of Oudate in February.

About twenty Akita dogs are paraded and an area is set aside to allow the public to become directly acquainted with the Akita dogs. Mr. Matsukawa says that they are planning for a nationwide PR to attract younger people to the Akiho dog.

The Akita Dog The Akita dog was the first Japanese dog to be declared as a natural monument in 1931.

During the 1630s, the feudal lord from Oudate in the prefecture of Akita is said to have promoted dog fighting.

Primitive Japanese dogs used by the matagis [*Touhoku (Northern Honshuu around the Akita area) term for hunters*] in this area are believed to have been crossbred to native dogs from this area.

This is said to have given rise to the Akita dog. Hachikou was the faithful Akita dog that continued to come daily to the front of the ticket gate at the Shibuya Station in Tokyo even after the sudden death one day of his master, Professor Eizaburou Ueno at the Tokyo Imperial University.

This story soon had a nationwide response from the public.

Photograph: The Akita dog is now in a sharp decline owing to the small type dog boom.

Note:

Words in italics by the translator, Tatsuo Kimura.

Translated 1/31/2005 Yomiuri 12505