

# VICTIMS OF A FASHION FAD

## Bred to satisfy a celeb craze for 'handbag' dogs, their only hope is one courageous British woman



Our saviour: Brave Elizabeth Oliver

**S**URGING forward in desperation after weeks without food or water, these forlorn, whimpering dogs were left to die in filth by Japan's notorious gangsters, cashing in on the celebrity craze for 'handbag-size' dogs.

In another haunting photograph taken minutes after a raid on an illicit breeding den, the pleading eyes of a bulldog whose neck narrowly fits through the wire struts of his cage tell a harrowing story of cruelty and neglect.

The malnourished pedigree dogs were unwanted

breeding stock for an underground industry netting millions of pounds a year for criminal gangs — until their rescue by one remarkable British woman. Elizabeth Oliver, 70, last year awarded an MBE, has spent 20 years battling against their inhumane treatment by Japanese breeders, and the authorities who turn a blind eye.

Mrs Oliver, director of Animal Rescue Kansai, is bravely taking on a complex network overseen by the Yakuza mafia, who have found breeding dogs even more profitable than drugs and prostitution.

The ruthless gangs snatch cute puppies off their mothers from as early as one week old so they can be displayed in gaudy pet shops, where small dogs with painted nails are the must-have fashion accessory — a Western trend popularised by celebrities such as Paris Hilton, Adele, Donatella Versace and model Miranda Kerr.

'The dogs are left to breed among themselves in tiny apartments,' says Mrs Oliver, originally from Somerset. 'Then, one day, the breeders realise they have too many — and that they're too big to sell — and just go. A lot of gangsters will be arrested for an unrelated crime and the dogs get left behind. Sometimes these places are so filthy you can't step inside.'

'I've been chasing one breeder for years. When we went to his premises on the southern island of Kyushu, we found dead and dying dogs everywhere. It was absolutely appalling.'

'There were hundreds of dogs crammed into tiny cages. They were underweight, with terrible skin conditions. The breeder had just left them and locked the door behind him.'

'For these gangsters dog breeding has become very lucrative. They were into drugs, guns and prostitutes, but now they are all into dog breeding.'

'One of them tried to attack me; I had to run for my life. He was prosecuted eventually, and he was banned from breeding. The penalty was a fine of about £2,000, not a proper penalty.'

'He is still breeding now. People had been complaining, but the authorities did absolutely nothing.'



Bagged: Miranda Kerr and puppy



Fashion follower: Adele and friend



Left to die: Whimpering dogs that have been used to breed puppies. They were left without food or water when their gangster owner abandoned them in their filthy illicit den



Caged: A bulldog tries to escape through a gap in the wire



Behind bars: Another casualty of the craze for tiny dogs



Pitiful: A Shiba Inu awaits his fate on death row

**E**VEN when the authorities are persuaded to intervene, the freed dogs face a terrible fate, sent to a mechanised death row where they are allowed one week's grace for a new owner to emerge. After that, they are gassed in a steel container called a 'dream box'.

A Daily Mail investigation has uncovered new details of what is effectively a state-sanctioned policy of extermination. At the 'animal welfare' centre in Tokushima, recently built for £16million, death-row dogs are placed into a special truck to be gassed off site before being cremated.

The impressive building is set in landscaped parkland with a playground and picnic tables on the front lawn. It does a remarkable job of disguising its true purpose.

On the day our reporter received a tour, some of the native Japanese Shiba Inu dogs had two days left before the metal bars to the rear of their cages would slide up to announce the end of their lives.

Seeming to have a tantalising glimpse of freedom, the animals will then walk unknowingly into a narrow steel corridor in which a separate metal plate nudges them forward.

At the touch of a button, they are forced to step into a container called a dream box, which will soon be filled with noxious carbon dioxide.

The box, on which the soothing Japanese word for 'sleep' has been written, is lowered into a waiting truck. Once the lorry has moved calmly off the premises, the gassing begins, activated by a vet at a control desk. It takes approximately two minutes for the animals to die and then be driven off for cremation. Up to 20 are killed here every working day.

As Mrs Oliver says, 'Outside it's like a Disneyland, inside it's like Auschwitz. They have spent millions coming up with a system so they can press a button to gas the dogs, and no one

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