

Dodgy traders selling sick pets

Timothy Chui
Monday, May 04, 2009

When Doris Wong Yuen-yee bought week-and-a-half-old Scottish Fold kitten Marble for HK\$500, she thought she had got a good deal.

However, within a week the clerical officer from Ma On Shan discovered her pet had a sickness, which is now eating up HK\$10,000 from her kitty every month.

Marble, now a year-and-a-half old, needs daily doses of nine different medications and supplements for her osteochondritis - joint inflammation - a common genetic problem that afflicts the breed prized for its deformed ears.

Wong, 38, bought her cat from an unlicensed hobby breeder and says cases such as hers could be avoided with better government regulation.

According to a survey of 576 people by pet concern group Happy Animals, 82.1 percent believe the government should register the paternity and maternity of bred animals, 80.6 percent think basic training should be given to pet shop employees, and 82.8 percent want pet stores to be graded.

A previous survey by the group found half of 200 respondents got their pets from pet shops and 30 percent of these pets developed ailments within the first week.

Happy Animals spokeswoman Carmen Chan Wai-man said: "To deal with hereditary diseases in pets we need a system of accounting for pets and their genealogy, such as in Japan. It will also be a platform to prevent and deal with viral outbreaks such as canine distemper which is a highly contagious and incurable disease which attacks a dog's respiratory, gastrointestinal and central nervous system."

Along with the Democratic Party, the group is calling for mandatory registration of pet breeders and stores to prevent the breeding and selling of animals with debilitating and hereditary diseases.

"The government has not paid much attention to pets even though the trade is becoming more brisk. Animal rights groups are strapped for resources to tackle this problem. However, different countries have different regulations against the breeding of animals with hereditary defects, such as in Australia," Democratic Party lawmaker and Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene chairman Fred Li Wah-ming said.

"There are many hobby breeders who are in it more for profit, breeding the animals in poor conditions and managing to get HK\$1,000 to HK\$10,000 a pet," he said, adding he would take the matter to the Legislative Council.

The groups are calling for the city to adopt a pet store registration scheme similar to Singapore's Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority's Pet Shop Grading, which ranks stores in four tiers, based on a store's environment, management and pet healthcare, in addition to mandatory requirements.