

NEWS

## British couple give up their home to move 2,000 miles away to look after stray dogs

Tony and Diane Rowles had no plans to open a rescue centre when they swapped Scotland for Bulgaria but now care for nearly 200 stray dogs and cats

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**BY PAMELA PATERSON**  
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**Kind: Diane with a rescued poach** (Photo: SWNS)

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A kind-hearted couple have swapped their Scots home for an animal shelter in Bulgaria where they care for nearly 200 stray dogs.

Tony and Diane Rowles decided to up sticks from Turriff in 2007 and move 2,000 miles to a southern Bulgarian town, where they hoped to find a more peaceful life for their family.

But after seeing the abuse [stray dogs](#) suffered in their new home of Rudozem, they decided to start their own rescue centre for the [animals](#), as they felt they "could not ignore their plight".

They now operate Rudozem Street Dog Rescue, a non-profit foundation that saves stray dogs from a life of hunger and abuse and rehomes them in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium.



**New life: Tony Rowles at his shelter** (Photo: SWNS)





**Puppy love: Couple re-home stray dogs** (Photo: SWNS)

The shelter is home to more than 200 dogs and cats, and the family has taken some time to get used to the culture change in a rural part of the country, near the border with Greece, where there is very little in the way of animal welfare resources.

Arriving in Bulgaria at the end of the summer 2007, the Rowles and their four children, four dogs and two cats, had no plans to start a rescue centre, and were even considering opening a cafe.

But after just a few months, the family could no longer ignore the animal abuse taking place on their doorstep - where stray and starving dogs were at risk of being shot, stoned or beaten.



**Shocking: Diane and Tony couldn't ignore the abuse** (Photo: SWNS)



**Dog lover: Diane had no plans to start a rescue centre** (Photo: SWNS)



One day, just weeks after they arrived in Kudozem, their youngest son, Luke, befriended a street dog which started to follow him around.

The poor animal had been shot, beaten and had part of its skull smashed in.



**Puppy love: Animal centre is home to more than 200 dogs** (Photo: SWNS)

It would lie outside waiting for Luke at night, despite neighbours beating it with large sticks and throwing stones at it.

Eventually the family adopted the canine and named it Ranger, saving it from an almost certain death.

Soon more street dogs were brought to the Rowles' home, and when the number reached 85 they decided they needed to expand.



**Word spread: Tony says locals turned up with unwanted dogs** (Photo: SWNS)

Tony said: "When word spread that we were rescuing dogs, people just started turning up to give us unwanted animals. We soon realised we couldn't go on like that and took the decision to set up a proper animal rescue shelter.

"You have to do what you can - you just can't stand by and watch and do nothing. That's simply not an option for us.

"It's just non-stop. Eight years ago when we first started we thought it will only be for a couple of years but it's as bad now as it was back then. It's overwhelming.

"We came back with export forms for the dogs going to new homes and had a request to take in another 27 puppies and dogs that had been injured."

Diane and Tony Rowles

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**Non-stop: Diane and Tony bought old building in 2010** (Photo: SWNS)

Diane, 53, said: "I always had dogs growing up and when you see how many are treated here, it does get you down sometimes.

"So we bought an old building with a big yard back in 2010 and are looking to renovate that as soon as possible. In the meantime, we are doing as much as we can for as many dogs as possible.

**Read more: [Is this the world's biggest dog? 7ft tall hound can eat an entire cow leg](#)**

"Although we never intended to be rescuing street dogs when we moved to Bulgaria, we couldn't ignore their plight.

"Now that we have started, it is a lifetime commitment. There are times when it is heartbreaking but we could never leave what we have started otherwise there would be no one to care about and fight for these dogs."

Diane and Tony Rowles

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**Plight: Couple have made lifelong commitment to stray dogs** (Photo: SWNS)

The centre experienced opposition from locals in the town, as well as the municipality, and at one point the Rowles were threatened with arrest.

But the family have continued their work, with Diane and Tony's sons, Luke and Liam, helping out at the shelter, along with recruited members of staff.

They take animals which have been adopted to their new homes by van through Europe, with most going to Holland.

Tony with some kittens they also rescued in Bulgaria

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**Abandoned: Tony with some kittens they rescued** (Photo: SWNS)

Tony, 49, said: "This year we want to concentrate on getting as many adoptions as possible and as much raised as possible.

"When we get the chance, we can start on either the first part, middle part or end shed, as we call it, and get one gutted and start building proper pens plus a perimeter fence, gates and maybe exercise yard fencing."


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**Oneredlion**

372 DAYS AGO

Thank you Tony and Diane for doing what you are doing. I admire people like you. I am starting a new business in honor of Cecil that will launch within 3-6 months. It pertains to non-profits/all non-profits and not just animal organizations and will be promoted globally. I hope to have you listed on my site to help you create awareness and receive donations. During the interim, I have started my personal blog which pertains to my passion for animals and stopping and preventing animal abuse. I'm going to put your story on my blog. Good Luck!

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**Debs**

380 DAYS AGO

So nice to read about some good people doing something positive for a change, especially involving animals. This couple have hearts of gold and I wish them every success..

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**Dogmummy**

380 DAYS AGO

We have adopted two dogs from RSDR, Ella Rose and Beano. They are the sweetest nature and would have surely died if Tony and Diane had not rescued them. Please everyone have a look at the RSDR Facebook and Twitter feeds to find out more. You can donate through the website [streetdogrescue.com](http://streetdogrescue.com) They deserve so much support because they do their work in very difficult circumstances.

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