

March 2016

Stray animals in Gjumri, Armenia

A new Robin Hood- project is born

In the middle of February I was in Armenia; in reality I wanted to help the remaining lions in the zoo of Gjumri, but they were already saved; they will come in a bear enclosure in Romania, where they will be in good hands.



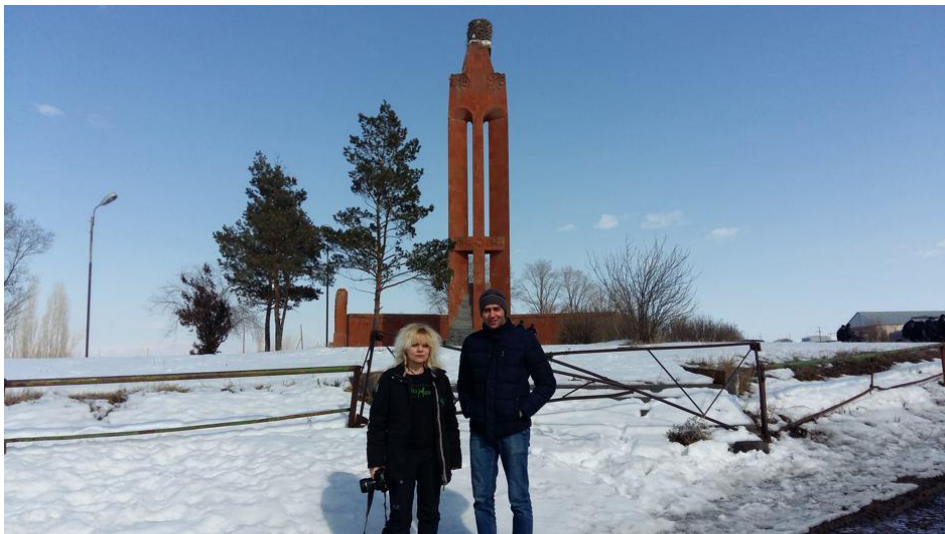
But shortly after the flight via Moscow was booked, it turned out, that the lions had been adopted by a british organisation. In the zoo only these bears and lions had been left behind, Armenian animal lovers cared for them provisionally, but now they are all saved.



I couldn't cancel my cheap flight anymore, so I talked with the Armenian animal lovers and it turned out, that they needed help for the stray dogs and – cats in their town.

At half past four in the morning I arrived in the pitch dark night in Eriwan. A driver, a giant of man, who didn't speak one word in english, fetched me up. Then we drove through the pitch dark Armenia. Fortunately I'm not a fearful person...

After just 2 hours we stopped somewhere – there should be the hotel. After long time ringing it was opened. I could sleep for only 2 hours, because I had traveled the whole night - then I was glad to meet Shant and Armen, two young men engaging for their country. Shant works with an organization, Armen is a tour guide. Both are animal right activists and Shant is also vegan and has grown up in Detroit.



We understood each other immediately.

Gjumi is an old town, but a lot is destroyed because of the great earthquake in Armenia. Armenia is a poor but beautiful country. I felt myself at home right from the beginning, but maybe, it's because of my affiniation to the east.





We went to the market, colourful fruits and vegetables freshed up the grey of the town. The houses here are not painted, that`s why the town and the whole country has its own flair. Dogs followed us, people were kind to the animals. Cats crossed our way. The streets were still completely covered with ice, but it was thawing. So it was a challenge to walk on the streets, wading through water, sliding on ice plates... the reflections of the sun were beautiful to watch, everything was bathed in a strange light.

The dogs and cats were looking well-fed, they live from the waste and it seemed, that there`s plenty of it, because there was also waste beside the garbage cans, therein they can find a lot. I could also see bones, appearentey people threw it to them.

Living animals were also sold on the market. Turkeys, Chickens, ducks, rabbits... a rabbit with blue eyes sat in a small wire cage, Armen and I looked at each other and we probably had the same thoughts.

In the morning we had an appointment with the vice mayor. It seemed to be a special event, because the local TV was there and they filmed everything. The man was very kind and interested. I asked him, if it`s true, that the dogs were shot. His statement was like politicians use to react: He said, the dogs are only shot, when they are dangerous. But is it really always so easy to see, if they are? And who decides, if and when ...

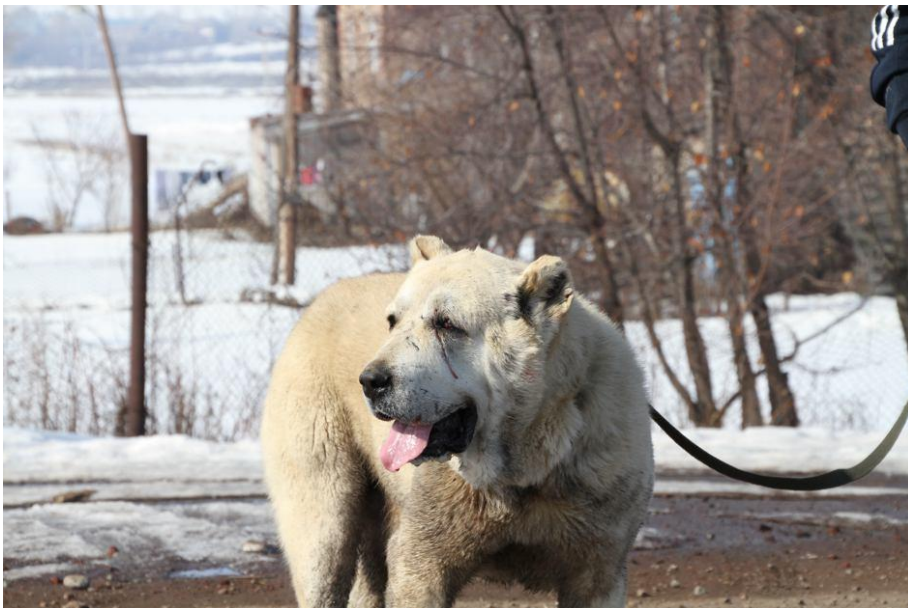
I proposed a castration-project, also for the street animals – maybe, I`m in the welcome position and would be allowed to bring them back on the streets again after the procedure... A small animal shelter for emergencies was also included in my proposal. The vice mayor was not averse and wanted us to put everything on paper and send it to him.



Armen showed me the town, as a tour guide he's the best person in charge for that, unfortunately we didn't have much time, because I was there for another reason.

I enjoyed Gjumi always better. There's even vegan food. 😊

On the next day we drove to a village and discovered protected stork nests, stray dogs - and one dog, abused as a fighting dog, this one I couldn't get out of my head.



We saw a tank in the deep snow, in the middle of the village, cars from the time of the Sowjet Union passed the streets, Wolga for example... a strange country.



By car we visited the places, where the straydogs used to reside and we really found them. The dogs looked for something to eat in the snow, but they didn't make a bad impression. It seemed, that the castration project would be sufficient and we didn't have to worry about the dogs actual situation. But I was there only for a short period and that was just my first impression.

We also drove to my original target, to the zoo of Gjumi. What a pitiful sight: old and rotten wagons, all were empty, all but one for the rabbits, having a lot of space now. The man, who probably lived here - and who had fed the bears and lions, when the owner had stopped to care for them – made a poor impression.

A watchdog seemed to be his companion, but he also looked very sad, naturally chained up. A young dog, but in my opinion he looked old. Unfortunately I could do nothing or at least not yet.

The sun shined, the sky was deep blue, it was thawing and rather warm. On the streets small lakes were formed, in which the light was breaking, everything looked like springtime and a positive change.



That`s at least what I felt...I walked through Gjumi alone and discovered more dogs and cats. I sat on a bench in the sun and watched the dogs, who really seemed to bother no one. I thought, that we could start something new in this country, of whom many doesn`t even know, where it`s located. I had to look on the map myselfm to find the names of the countries, of those Armenia is surrounded. The great advantage is the fact, that these young men, Armen and Shant, are clever, committed and want to do something for the animals. A project stands and falls with the people on-site and here I had a really good feeling.



I thought about the blue eyed rabbit and wanted to redeem him, but what should I do with him?

Yes, I know, ransom is no solution, but...



I'll go ahead, before I forget: Armen already found people, who admit animals; and he could redeem the rabbit - and also a second one, who is still separated, because the male rabbit has to be castrated before ...

And that's the next point: I asked Armen to find and to contact a veterinarian, who would participate in the castration project. And who is qualified to castrate cats and dogs. Otherwise I would have to send a veterinarian for a training. Perhaps I've already found one for this job...



The short stay in Armenia was very successful. On the last day I drove back to Eriwan, where I met Shant. We had a meeting with local animal rights activists, that are already active in Eriwan. They informed me, that it`s not easy to get the necessary anaesthetics for castrations in the country, because they are partially forbidden. We have to try, to get all we need - and what is legal – from Russia. It`s a great challenge, but we are confident, we will succeed.

All in all the stay can be seen positive: the municipality, the two young men, who are motivated and committed... we will try, to make this project and I think, we will achieve our goals.

So Robin Hood is active in another country again to spread animal welfare. I`m looking forward to another successful project. ☺

















