

RUSZALA

Requested by Pat Walsh.

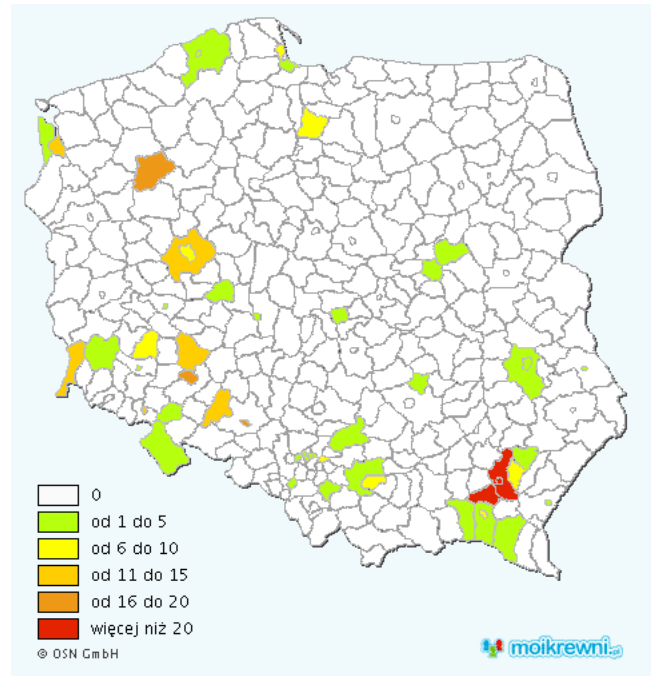
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In Polish this name is usually spelled **Ruszała**, with the “hard” *l* written with a slash or crossbar through the middle. That name is pronounced roughly “roo-shah’-wah.” When Poles with that letter in their names left their homeland, they soon found that people speaking other languages didn’t know what to make of that letter *l*. It usually ended up as plain *l*, though in some cases it was spelled phonetically as *w*, which is what it sounds like to English speakers. But in most cases *l* became plain old *l*.

The Moikrewni site (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/rusza%25C5%2582a.html>) shows no one in Poland as of 2002 who spelled it *Ruszała*, which is not surprising. There were 803 Polish citizens who went by *Ruszała*. While the name was scattered all over the country, almost two thirds of all *Ruszałas* were concentrated in just three counties of Podkarpackie province in southeastern Poland: Strzyżów (357), Rzeszów (71), and municipal Rzeszów (98). They are marked in red on the map at right. The next largest number was 18, in Wałcz county in north-western Poland. So while this data does not allow us to jump to the conclusion that a *Ruszała* family must have come from the area of Strzyżów and Rzeszów, it does suggest that’s the area we might want to concentrate on first.

Polish surname expert Kazimierz Rymut mentioned this name in his book *Nazwiska Polaków* [The Surnames of Poles]. He lists it under names from the root *rusz-* as seen in the verb *ruszać*, “to set off, to move, to touch.” Surnames in the form *X-ala* usually started out meaning “one always doing X, one of whom X is the most prominent characteristic.” Thus *nos* is “nose,” and *Nosala* means “one with the big nose”; *mądry* means “wise,” and *Mądrala* means “know-it-all, smart aleck.” So it seems reasonable to suggest *Ruszała* started out as a nickname for an ancestor always on the move, one who couldn’t sit still. I doubt it was meant in a negative way. Probably it was applied to a person who had too much energy to sit around and do nothing—unless, of course, it was meant ironically and used for a lazy person who never moved, much as we might call a big guy Tiny.

I cannot explain why people named *Ruszała* are concentrated in the Strzyżów and Rzeszów area. It’s tempting to speculate on the matter: are folks in southeastern Poland more lively and active than others? Or did the name come to be associated with a single large clan of very active people, most of whom still live in the area, but some of whom moved elsewhere? From the name alone, we can’t tell. Only detailed research into the history of families named *Ruszała* might shed light on that.



Map showing the distribution of the surname **Ruszała** as of 2002.

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