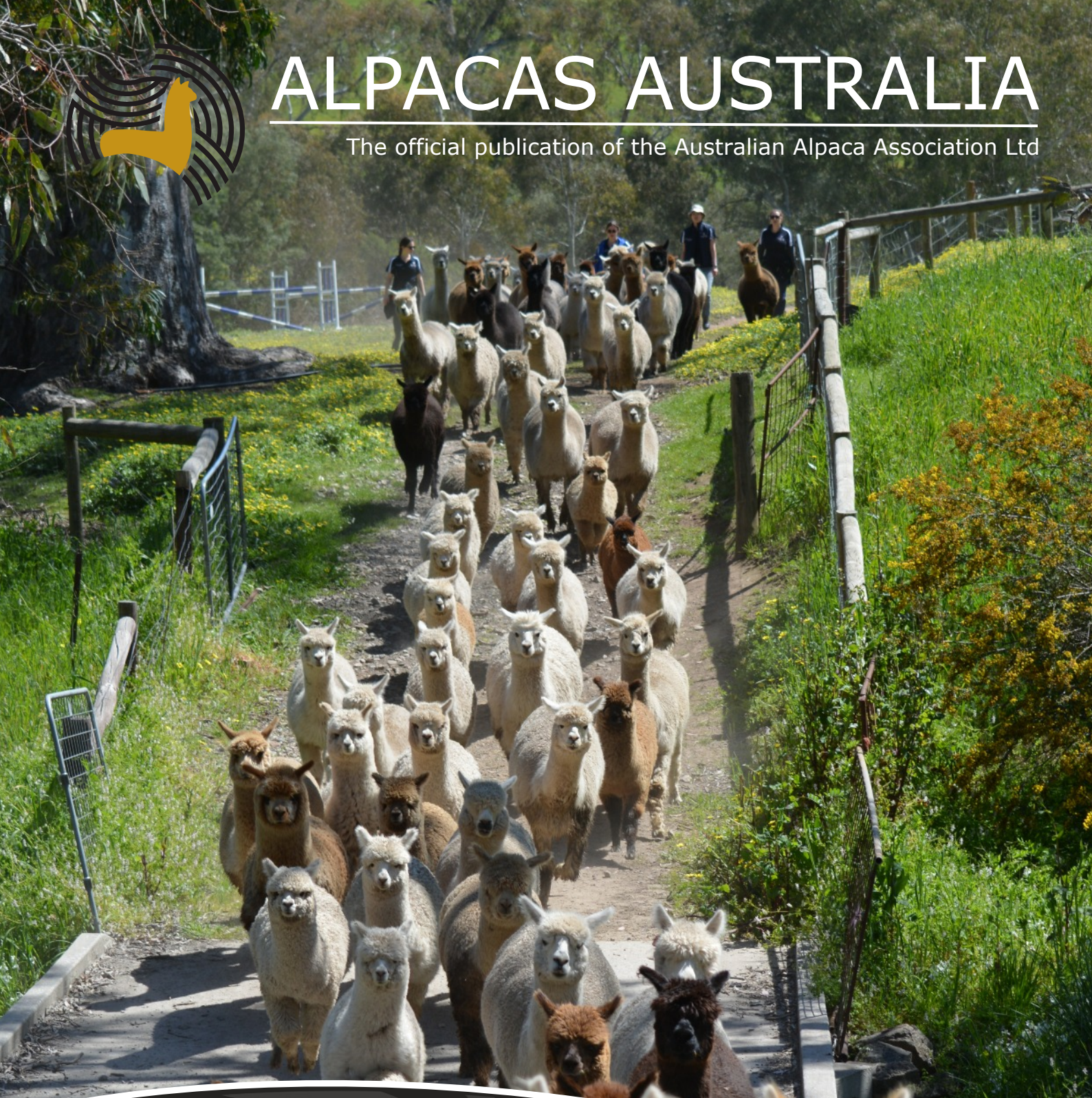
ALPACAS AUSTRALIA

The official publication of the Australian Alpaca Association Ltd



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- eAlpaca
- Perth Royal

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Issue 82 | Summer /Autumn 2017

In this Shearing Season please keep in mind…

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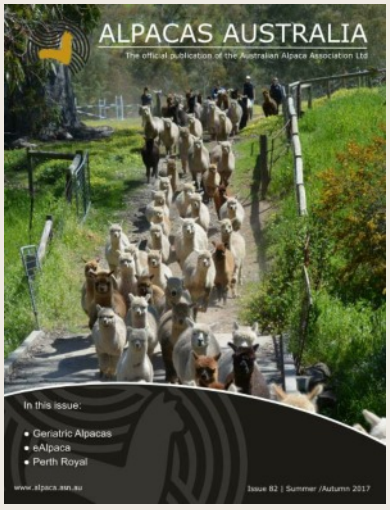

Cover: Herding Alpacas at Stansbury Alpacas SA
Photograph courtesy of Steve Marshall - Stansbury Alpacas

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Advertisers

Presidents Message

Firstly compliments of the season to all members and their families.

Hopefully, we are all now fully recovered from the Festive Season and implementing plans to insure that 2017 is a rewarding year in our agricultural endeavours.

This year, as breeders and members, we should have plans to move on our clip from our shearing season, and securing those markets that are available The buyers are out there, small co-ops are being formed with members joining together to move on raw fleece. Individual studs are purchasing fleece from other members, so don't you be the one that misses out. It is no use leaving it in your shed awaiting the EUREKA moment and that mystical price per kilo. That's not going to happen unless you get off your backside, expose the fleece to potential buyers, which will whet their appetite and increase demand.

The time is perfect now for the alpaca industry to make the transition from the perception of a cottage and pet industry, and be taken seriously as breeders of these fine animals, and the fleece and products made from them. You as members need to attend shows, have your animals judged and look upon the genetics of animals that are constantly recognised by our judges, as top place getters , and the reason why. With the owners permission, look at these animals and see what your herd may be lacking in this direction. Work on increasing your clip average, the more fleece you produce per animal, the more money you will collect from buyers.

Also it needs to be noted that less than 20% of our members exhibit animals. Excluding the members that do show, less than 0.5% of our members attend shows to check on what's going. I ask myself, is this apathy, a total lack of interest in your animals and the industry, or you just think your animals are not good enough. If you don't go you can not learn! Whilst on percentages it is interesting to also note that 75% of our members failed to lodge a vote at the last AGM. That is a sure sign of apathy!!

This year with the combination of the National Show and Sale with the Victorian Colourbration, to be known as Australian Alpaca Spectacular, we are hoping for 700 animals on display, with overseas visitors and local buyers attending. Make sure you make the effort and try and be one of the exhibitors or onlookers. You will find the experience totally rewarding, rub shoulders with fellow breeders from all over Australia, meet overseas guests, and enjoy a damn good social outing.

Put it in your calendar now!! Bendigo is the destination.

Early February sees our first Council meeting with Regional Presidents from all over Australia attending. Make sure you attend your next meeting on their return, to be briefed on the exciting new initiatives your Board is working towards, on your behalf.

Show season is about to start, so select your team, and may good fortune smile on all exhibitors.

Hopefully we will catch up at the various shows this year.

Kind Regards,
Ian Frith
President

Ekeko progeny have had an amazing year at top grade shows around Australia with 6 Supreme or Best Grey awards in 12 months!

To celebrate we are offering a very limited number of outside mating packages*

*Conditions apply

Tarraganda Lodge Ekeko - Sire of Grey Champions!

Vista Arando

Best Grey Huacaya AAA National Show and Sale August 2016

Supreme Grey Huacaya Carousel of Colour May 2016

Best Grey Huacaya Charles Ledger September 2015

Morning Star Rigel (owned by Precision)

Supreme Grey Huacaya Victorian Colourbration August 2016

Vista Comodin (owned by Goldleaf)

Supreme Grey Huacaya WA Colourbration July 2016

Vista Ninera

Supreme Grey Huacaya Victorian Colourbration August 2015

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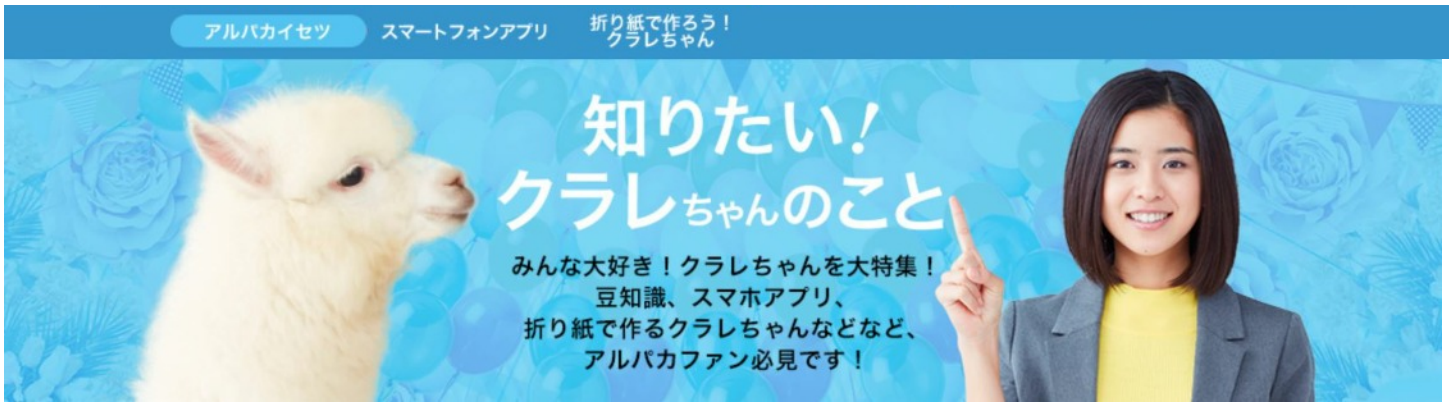
VISTA DEL SUD ALPACAS

Company Mascot - Kuraray Japan

By Julie McClen - Oak Grove Graphics



How do you get people in Japan to notice your company? Forget the run of the mill options, Kuraray in Japan decided alpacas were the way to go!

Established in 1926 - Kuyaray Co. Ltd. are manufacturers of a wide variety of products from plastics and resins to fabric and medical supplies for the dental industry. Their products can be found in mobile phones, school bags and food packaging.

In 2007, they launched an advertising campaign and in 2008 they started featuring an alpaca mascot.

At that time, the company was not well known to ordinary citizens, especially younger people because their business and products were not familiar to ordinary consumers.

So they started using alpacas in their advertisements in order to make a big impact and to make their company more memorable to everyday people in Japan.

At the time they launched their alpaca campaign, alpacas were not well known in Japan, so their advertisement became a hot topic, and possibly due to the advertising campaign launched by Kuraray, alpacas became popular with the Japanese.

Thanks to the advertising campaign, the recognition ratio among younger people went up and more and more university students have applied for employment with the company.

Kuraray's alpaca mascot is called Kuraray-Chan and the current alpaca playing this role is Rickey, he is the 10th generation Kuraray-Chan who had the correct temperament required for a famous much photographed mascot!

Extending it's alpaca mascots presence into the everyday lives of the Japanese people, Kuraray has even developed their own mobile phone 'Alpaca App' (above) that sends messages for you accompanied by various alpaca images to best reflect your mood.

On the Kuraray website you find many interesting links that stimulate interest in the alpaca and in turn help develop an association with the appealing alpaca and their company - developing a strong recognition by association in the minds of the people of Japan.

They also have regular quizzes and competitions where participants have the opportunity to win a variety of alpaca related prizes.

The Kuraray marketing website is full of alpaca imagery in the Japanese style, as per the examples below.

Enjoy a bit of Origami? Then you can even download this alpaca origami paper including the instructions to make an alpaca origami from the Kuraray web page at :

http://www.mirabakesso.jp/enjoy/index.html

Enjoy alpaca - Japanese style!

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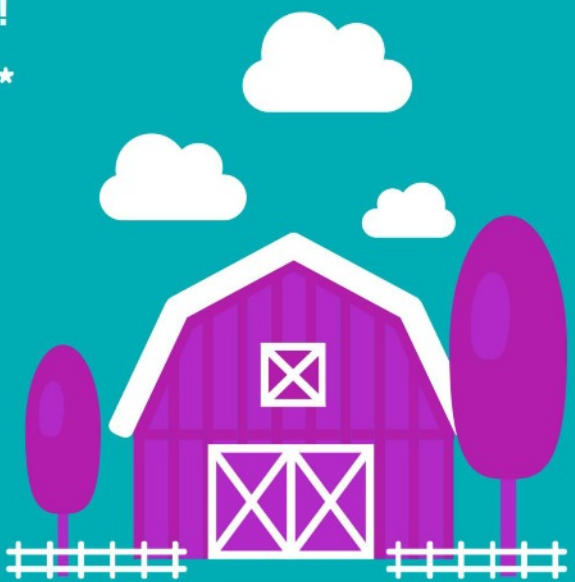

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Perth Royal Show - 2016

Entries for the 2016 Show were up slightly on previous years and the Judge Chris Williams, who was on his first judging assignment in Western Australia, commented afterwards that he had been impressed with the quality of many of the classes. He was quick to point out, however, if he thought an alpaca was not up to the standard he expected to see at a Royal Show.

The absence of some of the usual exhibitors was offset to some extent by a few new breeders showing for the first time which resulted in 99 Huacaya and 49 Suri's being entered in the Halter led classes along with 36 entries in the Fleece competition (33 Huacaya and 3 Suri).

Goldleaf Alpacas were easily the stand-out exhibitors when they won the Huacaya and Suri Supreme Championship trophies with Vista El Comodin in the huacaya section and Karri Heights Goldlocks Kristoff in the suri section .

The skill of Goldleaf stud principal Brett Fallon in selecting future champions was again evident as he had purchased Vista El Comodin as a very young alpaca.

For the second year in a row Kurrawa Legends Challenge owned by Faversham Alpacas took out the Supreme Huacaya fleece and the Most Valuable Commercial fleece awards. Add to this, his Champion Senior male award at this show and his numerous Champion and Supreme Champion awards at earlier shows and it is easy to see why his progeny are so eagerly awaited.

Bedrock Alpacas not only won the Supreme Suri Fleece award but also scooped the pool for the Sires Progeny awards with Bedrock Crusader for Huacaya and with Bedrock Corona in the Suri Sires progeny competition.

The 10 Championship awards for the Huacaya halter section were spread between seven competitors while 4 competitors shared the 8 Suri Championship awards.

Supreme Huacaya - Vista El Comodin owned by Goldleaf Alpacas - L-R Keith Doyle, Brett Fallon & Judge Chris Williams

Supreme Suri - Karrii Heights Goldilocks owned by Goldleaf Alpacas

HUACAYA

Futura started the Show in the best possible fashion by winning Champion Junior Female with Futura Miss Kitty and then followed that up by winning Champion Junior Male with Futura Iconic.

Bedrock Wanaka showed that her earlier successes as a junior across Australia was no fluke when she took out the Champion Intermediate female title. Ribblesdale Alpacas, one of the true broadacre farmers in our industry, are starting to enjoy success with their breeding program when Ribblesdale Jamie took out the Championship Intermediate Male award following their earlier success with Ribblesdale Opal as Reserve Champion Female.

It was great to see first time Championship winners, Willowsprings Alpacas, take out the Adult Female award with their aptly named Willowspring Triumph. The other Adult Championship was won by Vista El Comodin who went on to be crowned Supreme Huacaya.

Toffee Woods owner Melinda Brown celebrated a rare event when her senior female Toffee Woods Magica won her third age championship in a row when she took out the Senior Female Championship. Magica had earlier won Champion Junior female and Champion Intermediate female at the 2014 and 2015 Perth Royal Shows. Kurrawa Legends Challenge picked up another Championship award for Faversham Alpacas when he was Champion Senior male to go with his previous year's fleece winning this year's Supreme Fleece and Most Valuable fleece.

The two Mature age huacaya championship sections were won by Goldleaf Regal Poise and Swan Valley Achiever who both demonstrated that quality stands the test of time.

SURI

Suri numbers were up in the halter classes this year reflecting the efforts of the breeders to ensure they reversed the trend of earlier shows in 2016 where Suri numbers had dropped away.

Goldleaf, new to the ranks of Suri breeders, started the day well with Goldlocks Anna taking out the junior female championship and then followed up with Karri Heights Goldlocks Kristoff winning the Intermediate Male Championship before going on to win the Supreme Suri trophy.

Bedrock Alpacas collected three championship awards with Bedrock Customize - Junior male, Bedrock Cane – Adult Male, and Bedrock Cryptic – Senior male. For good measure they followed this up with winning the Suri Sires Progeny with Bedrock Corona and the Supreme Suri fleece with Bedrock Cryptic.

Suri stalwarts, Pitwillow Alpacas, had well deserved success with their Pitwillow Katz as Champion Intermediate female and Pitwillow Shadow as the Champion Adult Female. Fennasoft Alpacas returned to the winners circle when their Fennasoft Kesi took home Champion Senior female.

The full results for the 2016 Perth Royal Show are available on the West Australian Region website at alpaca.asn.au/wa.region

Use of Coloured Fibre – Part 1

By Elizabeth Paul

Introduction

It was the stunning range of natural colours that fascinated me right from the day I first saw alpacas in a group. I decided on the spot that I wanted to be an alpaca breeder. (The fact that we did not, nor were ever likely to have a farm, was mere quibbling on my husband's part, easily dealt with by arranging agistment.) I was also keen to explore the possibilities of utilising this beautiful fleece combined with the tradition of handmade articles that my mother, sister and I had been selling on craft stalls for many years. I was particularly attracted to the various shades of grey, and my first alpaca, bought on the same day was a beautiful little rosegrey female. (The fact that I could have just bought some fleece, and used that, was another quibble, easily dealt with by the extreme scarcity of grey fleece at the time.) I have had alpacas of all colours since then, but grey of any shade is still rare and still my favourite colour.

My aim with this article is to provide a few tips to small/new breeders wishing to utilise their own fleece (grey or not) but unsure where or how to start. As a member of the craft community, I have also heard some very negative comments from other craft workers who have already been sold or given very poorly presented alpaca fibre. If you, the breeder, would not like to use it yourself, it's best not to hand it on to craft workers to use, as one bad experience with alpaca fibre will almost certainly set them against it for life!

Cleanliness of Fleece

This is the single most important aspect of selecting a fleece for any purpose at all. Cleanliness does not refer to dirt, which can be washed out, but to vegetable matter, or VM. A fleece heavily matted with VM is useless. If the VM can't be removed by hand from the raw fleece, it is likely not be removed in processing, whether by hand or machine, but will become evenly distributed throughout the finished product.

Shearing time

Early shearing, before seed set, is the first and most useful thing breeders can do, to help with the problem of excess VM. Ensure that each fleece is bagged into three separate bags, saddle, neck and pieces. From a colour contamination point of view, my preference would be to shear the best blacks first, then up through the darker browns to lighter colours, and rose greys last. Naturally, if you had mostly white/light colours you would start with the whitest first.

Skirting

Preparation of fibre is all important. Even average grade fibre can be improved with good preparation. On the other hand, good quality fibre can be seriously degraded, due to lack of attention before processing.

Skirting a fleece is the removal by hand of all the matted dags or really hairy bits, dung clods, and vegetable matter that accumulate over a year on any fleece. Often the fleece is shorn off in two halves, so spread just one out on to a large flat table. As a matter of principle check it first for bits of wire, long thorns, binder twine, lumps of poo, dead mice etc. All these things have been found in fleeces either sent for processing, or being onsold to craft workers. Also, when bagging up later, do not dump the leggings back on top so that the receiver "gets the whole fleece". If you don't want it, it's very likely they won't either.

The first part of the fleece to skirt off, is the bird's nest. This is the point on the alpaca where the neck joins the backbone, and where the animal bends its head up and down. This bending constantly opens and closes the fleece, leading to a big concentration of vegetable matter. This fleece is usually very fine, but useless. Then go round the edge of the fleece, picking off the matted, poopy and cloddy bits. The more rubbish that you can pick off the fleece, the better. In a dark fleece, also look for lice eggs, often on the shoulder fleece. Areas of stained fibre, such as urine stain on a light fleece, or heavy bleaching on a darker one, should also be removed.

Selection

The most useable fleeces are those shorn between the ages of 2 and 5 years old, assuming annual shearing. Parameters of importance for craft work are handle, length, tenderness (breaks), and above all, as free as possible of VM. I have used fleeces of up to 10 year old animals if they have good enough handle and length.

While there have been great improvements in breeding, it would be fair to say that the average coloured alpaca fleece is still quite variable in fleece characteristics. The best, ie the finest fibre with the least hair will be found on the saddle, that is over the higher part of the flank from the neck, about half way along the back, but more towards the front. The rear and lower parts are often longer, and hairier, but if they still have good handle, by no means useless. I usually end up with a bag of good saddle, and longer coarser bits put aside. The neck fleece is usually much shorter, and finer, so that is another bag. In other words, try and make each bag as uniform as possible. If you have found a craft use for leggings or shorter hairy bits, go for it, but apply the same standard of cleanliness as to the other parts.

Note that mini mills usually charge by weight in. A bag of heavily contaminated fleece, or one which is very variable, is going to give you a lot less return for your money, than several smaller, more uniform lots. Processing loss can be as high as 50% or even more. You should check with your selected processor, for their VM criteria, minimum weights etc before sending any fleece. Also you will need to decide how you want it back, and depending on whether they will do it as carded batts, rovings or spun yarn, and in skeins or balls.

Micron

I prefer a micron range of 22-30u, average about 25u, with the handle assuming more importance in broader micron fleece. The fibre is physically more robust and more easily worked. Given a choice, I prefer an older, higher micron, cleaner fleece, to a softer, very tippy cria fleece.

Handle and Strength

Handle or feel of the fleece can be affected by dust levels, vegetable matter, dampness, etc. besides the actual micron. A more uniform fleece will have better handle, regardless of its micron. A tender fleece is one which will break somewhere along the lock, thus reducing the length of fibre and causing greater loss. Breaking close to one end is less of a problem than breaking in the middle. To test a fleece for tenderness, remove a whole lock and hold taut between two fingers of one hand, and flick with another finger, or try to pull the two ends apart. If the fleece is long with an end break, it's not really a problem to process it. I would reject a fleece that feels chalky or hard, remembering that in a drought year, a fleece can be stiff with dirt, which will just wash out. As I recall, fleece from a wetter year, some years ago, seemed to be softer, longer and cleaner than previous or later years when the weather was drier.

Long fleece

Long fleece for handspinning is not a problem. Really overlong fleece wraps itself around machinery. Overlong fleece would be the wether that hasn't been shorn for two or more years and is quite likely matted with dirt, straw etc. bin it.

Short fleece

Short fleece is more of a problem, as the shorter the fleece the more is lost in processing and the harder it is to spin. If too short for spinning, it can still be used for felting or stuffing. Check with your processor beforehand, what their preferred limits are. Do not combine widely different lengths in one batch, as you will lose too much in the processing.

Picking

The purpose of a picker is to break up the locks of fleece; it also blends the fibre and helps to remove some of the hair and cloddy bits. The hand picker that I use is a rocking cradle with two sets of long steel spikes, and looks like a weird mediaeval torture device.

Real fibre is broken up into individual fibres, floats up and drifts down into the bag. Hairy and cloddy bits tend to stay together so they are more easily picked out at this point. The rocking picker does not remove small vegetable matter, the tiny bits will be nicely blended all the way through. I only put a skirted fleece free of vegetable matter, through the picker. I discard the fibre and bits caught in the bottom of the picker. The fibre caught in the top half, can be pulled off (carefully) and added to the bag, as it will mostly be good. See pic below- bags of raw and picked fleece.

From a colour point of view, as I have mostly grey and black fleeces, I start with a cleaned picker and put the best black through first. A bit of extra black in a grey fleece is no problem, but not the other way round. If I was using white and fawn, then the best white would go through first, then the lightest fawns, darkest fawn or brown next, and a rosegrey would go through last of all.

Dehairing

Large commercial wool processors most likely do not have or use dehairing machines for two reasons: if they are mostly processing fine merino wool, there should be little need for a dehairer, because the merino industry has been breeding hair out. Also dehairing takes a lot of time, and therefore adds extra cost to the processing.

Mini mills do have small dehairing machines, and this is perhaps the biggest factor to improving to the quality of the finished alpaca yarn. The downside is that the return on very hairy fleece will be reduced. If breeders want to maximize their return, they need to skirt out (or breed out) as much coarse hair as possible.

Carding

Carding involves combing the fleece usually around a small rotating drum to make the fibres parallel. After several turns, the fibre is lifted off the drum in one piece called a batt. Hand drum carders are very useful to process small amounts of fleece, and for blending. In my opinion, the pins should be of finer wire, and a little closer together, than the short, fat, wide apart pins that are in normal use for sheeps' wool. I have not used flat carders much, as the length of alpaca fleece is a problem for these, and to me it just looks like a tangle.

I have used an electric drum carder but found it almost impossible to turn back the drum against the weight of the engine, to get the fibre off. Also it had a back roller, which for sheeps' wool combs the fibre down, but just seemed to pull the alpaca fibre up again. I sold it, my old drum carder broke, and now I just use the picker, it's quicker.

Coloured Fleece

Processing of any kind tends to blend all the fibre colours together. Different colours from one fleece can be separated at skirting. On a silver grey fleece, I leave black spots in, but skirt brown spots out. On a rosegrey fleece, I leave all the spots in unless there is one very large spot. If you want to see the variations in colour of an appaloosa fleece in a yarn, it should be handspun from the raw fleece, without carding or picking. (No it won't be spotty, but it will be streaky!)

Batching

In order to get a bigger lot for processing I often batch several fleeces that are similar regarding micron, length, handle, colour ie if they are most uniform. I also batch different colours in order to make another colour, or I combine leftovers to make a pieces batch. Depending on the quality of the pieces this can turn out quite useable yarn. As a general rule, I do not batch fine micron with broad micron to try and soften the broad fleece. Better products of both are obtained by keeping fleece of widely dissimilar microns separate. I also do not batch long and short together.

Combing Fleece

If not too heavily tipped, shorn cria fleece can also be retrieved, by combing out the tips of each lock with a dog comb. It is very time consuming but possible.

Washing

After trying to spin my first raw fleece, sitting in the attendant cloud of dust for ten minutes, I gave up on that idea forever.

For handspinning I washed all the fleece before putting it through the carder, and then I would wash the batts again before spinning. Now I put it all through the picker first without washing, before sending for processing to skeins, and then I wash the skeins.

Use warm to quite warm water with a drop of shampoo (any). Put handfuls of the fleece into net bags, push down into the water several times to expel the air. Even though it doesn't have lanolin, alpaca fleece is not very wettable the first time, and there will be pockets of air where the fleece doesn't get wet. Leave for 15/20 minutes. Drain and squeeze out the water, (don't rub) then place the bags in the washing machine on spin cycle to get the excess water out. Rinse in basin in clean water and spin again. Then the bags can be shaken up and put outside for drying.

You will need somewhere to contain the drying fleece, or it will all end up down the paddock. Note that unlike sheeps' wool, alpaca fibre at any stage can be sun dried, and fleeces can be put out in the sun for a while to perk them up.

See pic above - Skeins drying.

Skeins

If you have sent fleece off to be processed, you should be aware that conditioner is added to the fibre, so that it passes more easily through the machinery. The conditioner then picks up a lot of dust and dirt on the way through. You may be surprised at the amount that comes out , and how the handle of the yarn changes, with washing. See pic below left LH Bottle first wash water; RH Bottle rinse water. (Just on a breeding point, it would be inadvisable to try and breed more grease into alpaca fleece. That mistake was already made in the merino industry. Alpacas roll in dust to keep their fleeces clean and conditioned, and do not need more than a very little grease. The vision of a greased up alpaca, rolling in dirt daily, is not one which engenders much enthusiasm.)

For skeins, unwind the skein from its figure 8 shape and immediately tie a piece of waste wool around the other end from the tie. Then place, for example, two skeins in the net bag, wash as above. The bags can be wrung out, as long as you don't rub the wet fleece or skeins. Spin the excess water out, rinse and spin again. Remove the skein, hold by the tie end and flick out to straighten the wet yarn, and drape the skeins over a clothes line/stand for drying in the sun. Turn the skeins over at least once to dry the other side. A warm windy day is the best day for drying. I ball up all my own yarn with a standard yarn baller.

Wet Fleece

Alpaca fleece/yarn must be fully dry before storing, as wet fleece will go mouldy quickly and the smell is almost impossible to remove. Shorn fleece wet with urine must be dried or washed immediately, as if left bagged, it will have to be binned. I dry skeins over at least two days to be sure, or put them in front of a heater. Vegetable matter can also be picked out of the dried skeins before using or balling up.

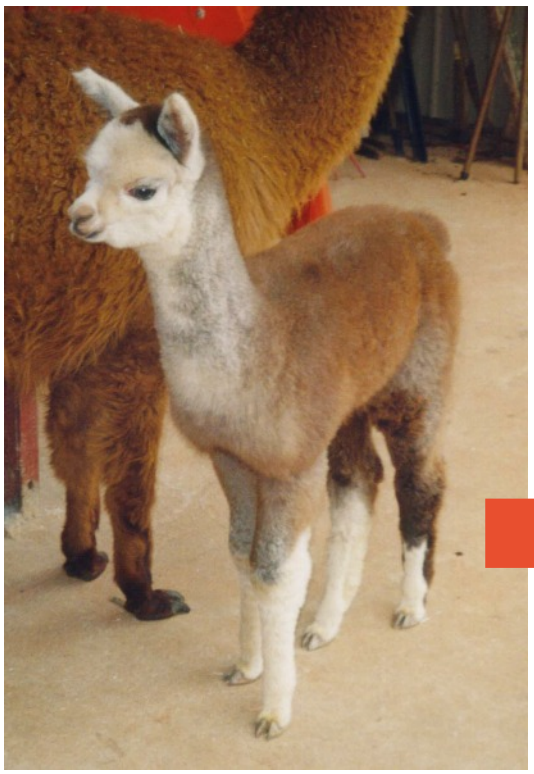
Cria Clipping

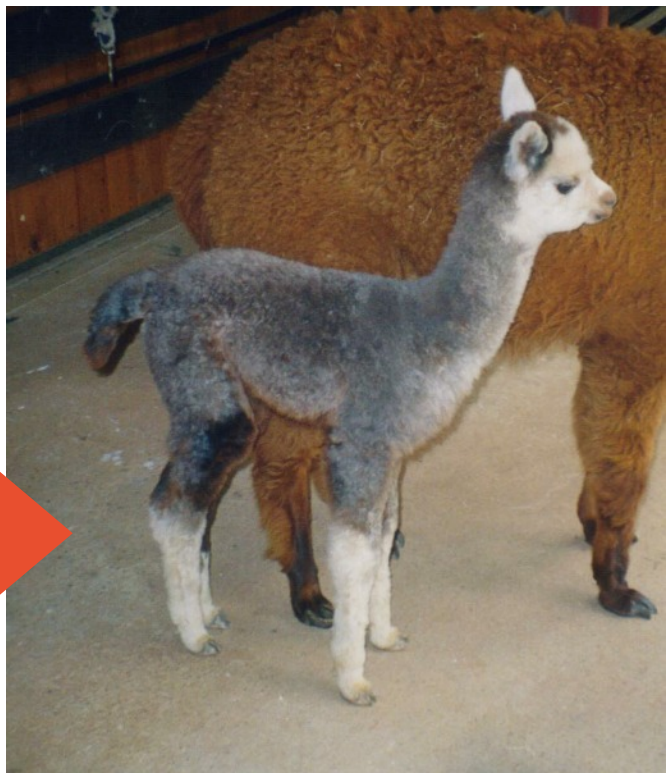
Cria fleece may be the finest fleece that an alpaca will ever produce, but for what I make, it is less useable than older fleeces. The main reason for this is the cria tips, which can accumulate a large amount of rubbish before first shearing. I have seen crias in the show ring looking like hay bales with legs. Once the tips are gone they never come back, and the fleece will be in more useful condition come first shearing. Crias born a few weeks prior to shearing, can be shorn by the shearer.

Crias born post shearing can be clipped using small animal clippers with a skip tooth blade. I prefer a No 4 or No 5 skip tooth blade. The best age to clip a cria is 1-2 weeks if the cria is strong and healthy. A very young cria is smaller, and the fleece is shorter and cleaner, all taking less time and effort. The cria can be sat in cush, stood up or even held by someone else. Of course someone must actually hold the cria, it isn't just going to sit by itself (although I have had one fall asleep). If sitting I have used a firm pad of foam for it to sit on, rather than a hard table or the floor. The clippers are used in short bursts, rather than a long pass, and it may take a few gentle clips to get the bottom of the blade to sit in contact with the cria. I start at the rump, aiming forwards and turn the clippers to one side frequently to get rid of accumulated fleece. Very young crias may need a cria coat for a couple of days. The blades are delicate and should be professionally resharpened every two crias.

Colourwise, blacks and greys show the most benefit from cria clipping. I usually have at least two mums and crias in, so that the mother is not too anxious while bub is gone. Overall I have had very few problems with cria rejection, but breeders know their own females best, and obviously a cria with a nervous or stressy mum should be left alone until shearing. Clipping notes of course only relate to huacaya crias.

See pic at left before clipping and at right after clipping.





Geriatric Alpacas

by Stephen Mulholland, Ph.D. For the Camelid Health Trust www.camelidhealth.org

Not everyone keeps alpacas for commercial purposes, for some they are treasured pets and companions. As such, we want them to have the longest, and best, lives possible.

As alpacas get older some of their care needs change, and this article tries to address some of the issues for keeping your older animals happy and healthy. The ease with which this can be done is affected by both your herd size, and by how easily your animal can be handled. The better your knowledge of what is "normal" for your alpaca, the more likely you are to catch problems when they are still small and manageable.

When is an alpaca "old"?

Alpacas (and llamas) are considered "aged" when they hit twelve years old. (As per Chapter Eleven of Llama and Alpaca Care - Medicine. Surgery, Reproduction, Nutrition and Herd Health. This is an excellent book full of the latest veterinary knowledge of camelids. I reference it often.) But as anyone who owns camelids knows, animals in their teens vary widely in their health, vigour and apparent age.

There are some female alpacas that can still successfully reproduce and nurse into their early twenties, while others struggle to maintain weight at age twelve.

Deciding when an animal has transition from 'aged' to 'old' is a matter of observation and understanding the specific needs of individual animals.

Alpaca and llamas can be expected to live into their twenties with a bit of luck, care, and good management. A fifteen to twenty year life span is more typical currently in New Zealand. The oldest alpaca we have ever had died at age twenty four and four months.

The oldest alpaca I know of in New Zealand lived to be about twenty eight. But of course those animals were born when we knew much less about camelids, and it is possible that the cria being born today might have different lifespans (and only time will tell if modern management practices result in longer lifespans than the practices of two decades ago).

Why do alpacas vary so widely in their health in their later years?

We don't know the whole story, but it is likely influenced by factors of genetics, their start in life , what they were exposed to in their early years, and how demanding a life they have led.

Common problems with older animals:

Nutrition and Supplements

Good nutrition is vital for maintaining the health and body condition of older animals. Older animals can have trouble getting sufficient food from grazing, either due to mobility issues or decreasing ability to eat and chew effectively. It is also possible that an older animal has a decreased ability to absorb nutrients. This could be due to parasite-inflicted damage to the intestinal walls years earlier. Issues can arise with older animals purchased as adults, as you have no idea what health problems they had in their youth, and the impact these could have on their health in their older years.

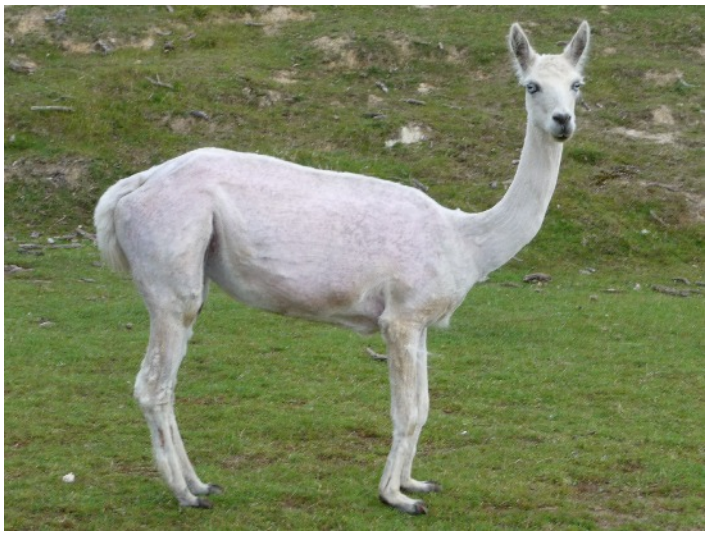
When offering supplements it is important that you ensure the older animals get what they need without socially excluding them. Younger, pushier animals may try and monopolize the tasty extra feed, not leaving enough for the less dominant animals. (That being said, in our experience the older animals are often some of the most dominant, though your experience may be quite different from ours.) If your herd size is small enough, separating animals and feeding each their own quantity works well, but this not always practical depending on your herd and farm setup. It may be more efficient to separate your herd into compatible groups at feeding time to ensure everyone get their fair (and required) share. Note- when feeding supplements always consider the need to maintain a balanced diet. Talk to your vet about what options would work best in your circumstances.

One easy trick is to provide twice as much supplementary feed every other day. The dominant animals can only eat so much, and will eventually wander away leaving the lower- social orders to eat their hay-nuts-chaff or other feed in peace. This can also be easier than trying to separate the older animals at every feeding session. Some feed, particularly grain-based, can be dangerous if consumed in too large a quantity, so again talking to your vet is a good idea.

Teeth

Camelid teeth grow throughout the lifetime of the animal. Ideally the growth rate of the teeth matches the wear from eating grass, hay and other woody materials. As time passes, the chances of problems with the teeth increases.

Incisors – These front teeth are used to tear the grass. In some older alpacas they can become so worn down that they cannot eat effectively. While the worn teeth cannot themselves be corrected, the animal can be provided 'easily to eat' feed in the form of very long and lush grass, hay, dried lucerne chaff, or processed "alpaca nuts" to help them get sufficient nutrition.



Molars - These teeth are at the back of the mouth are used during 'cud chewing', the rumination that helps to grind down the plant material for better digestion in the rumen. They can wear unevenly over time, and develop sharp edges that cut the insides of the gums, or they can wear into a shape that prevents easy and efficient chewing.

Many alpacas will show signs if they are having trouble with their teeth. 'Quidding' - hold a large wad of material in one cheek all the time - is a way they try to keep their tender gums away from sharp teeth. An animal that is dribbling out food while eating may also have a dentition issue.

Older teeth are also more susceptible to breaks, abscesses, or tooth loss. Problems with molars can often be addressed by a veterinarian trained in dentistry (usually equine dentistry). If you think your alpaca may be having trouble chewing their food, talk to your vet.

Fleece and Temperature Regulation

Fleece grows more slowly as an animal ages, and this can affect how you manage their temperature through summer and winter. You have to look at your own circumstances (location, climate, farm facilities) and determine if heat or cold stress plays the greater danger. Older animals can be more vulnerable to both heat and cold, so extra provisions for shade and cooling in summer will have to go along with shelter and warmth in winter.

Wainui enjoys his warm jacket and breakfast - photo courtesy Vicki Cordier

How often and how closely an animal is shorn will play a large role in their health during their later years. An animal only growing 20 to 30 mm of fleece each year may only need to be shorn every second or third year. If that animal lived in a place with particularly harsh winters, then shearing might only involve roughly clipping back the over-long fibre while leaving a considerable amount (20+ mm) on the animal. Yes, your alpaca will likely look quite ragged after such a trim, but they will be very appreciative of the extra fleece when the cold winter winds start blowing!

Other solutions can include acclimatizing your alpacas to wearing covers (winter coats) before they become a necessity. Also be sure to provide extra food during the colder months to help them keep warm. When the grass is very short, long (50mm) fibre from hay will help stimulate the rumen, which helps to produce heat and keep the alpaca warm. You should also plan to place your older and more vulnerable alpaca in a paddock that provides good shade and shelter from wind/rain/sun/snow or whatever your local climate may throw at them. Alpaca can be trained to spend their nights indoors, which can be a good way to keep them away from the worst weather. By making such housing routine, it prevents the stress caused by man-handling reluctant older and vulnerable animals into a shelter.

Eyes

Old alpaca can suffer from cataracts, and may go partly or completely blind. This is by no means the end for the affected animals. If you have safe paddocks in which they can live, the vision-impaired animal may be able to carry on for many years. As alpacas are very social animals, you may find that a friend will look after them in the paddock. Sometimes this can be a bond between two alpacas, in other cases herds will often have some alpaca who task themselves with making sure the herd does not get scattered. They will go back to find and assist stragglers.

You may have to alter some aspects of your paddocks to make them safe for such animals, and more frequent checks of the herd may be needed to ensure the affected animal is continuing to cope well. (We have a friend whose small herd has a fun pair of wethers. One is mostly-blind, the other is completely deaf. The two are inseparable, and working together they safely navigate their way through life.)

Alpaca with vision impairments may need to be housed at night for their safety (along with a few friends, of course). Animals that cope well in full daylight may become much more nervous or agitated as light levels drop, and as such may need to be moved to safety before dusk.

Leg Tendons (and other mobilities problems)

Wear and tear on joint, tendons and other aspects of the muscular and skeletal systems can cause both pain and mobility problems. Alpacas can get arthritis.

An alpaca with 'bad' legs might still live a long and happy life. In our experience we purchased a 16 year old female as part of a whole-herd transfer. (See photo top left) When we got a good look at her forelegs we noticed that due to contraction of her tendons her fetlocks were nearly scraping the ground. "Poor thing," we said, "she's not likely to last through the winter." But she lasted through that winter, and six more, before dying at age twenty three of an unrelated condition. By keeping her in paddocks that were had a gentle contour she could cope even with a slow and awkward gait.

With leg issues, particularly arthritis, pain can become a significant issue. As camelids are notoriously stoic, it can be difficult to spot one suffering from chronic pain. An animal in pain might display a hunched posture, a reluctance to stand – which might be spotted as an animal that is cushed more often than the rest of the herd, have a change in gait (locomotion), show a loss of weight (because they cannot spend enough time grazing and foraging), or a drastic change in social status. We had one eight year old wether that developed an early-onset arthritis, and it was clear that when the other boys began rambunctious play he was obviously afraid of body contact, the chest - buts and leg nips that playful boys enjoy. In his case we eventually had to have him euthanised, as he was both in constant pain, and he could no longer happily maintain social connection with his fellow alpaca.

Having an outsider (either a veterinarian or another experienced camelid owner) assess your older animals periodically can be useful, as it can be easy to miss a slow incremental slide downwards in terms of mobility and discomfort, which a set of fresh eyes can spot instantly.

Parasites and Infection

Fleece and teeth are not the only body functions that can slow down with age. So to, the immune system may struggle to cope with environmental challenges as it ages.

The most common problem is likely to arise from an increased vulnerability to internal parasites (worms). Older animals should be checked frequently to assess their body condition scores. An animal losing weight, presuming it has access to good feed and teeth sufficient to consume that feed, should be checked for parasites.

The ability to fight off infection can also be a problem. For an animal with a failing immune system even the smallest wound can degenerate into a potentially deadly infection.

Mental Decline

Alpacas can get dementia. In severe cases you may have an animal that keeps losing its herd, wandering around, or seems to get lost in a paddock it has known for years. Management may involve keeping the affected animals in areas with few hazards, or in smaller paddocks where it cannot lose sight of its herd mates.

Social bonds remain important even in the elderly animals suffering mental decline, and if you want to ensure that they are in a good state of welfare you will need to keep them with friends.

In both of the above cases, in a large herd you may be able to split off a small sub-herd of 'oldies' and other at risk animals that can keep each other company. If you do this be sure not to break up any recognised strong friendships that will exist between some of your alpaca. Alpacas are known to have these strong social connections, and will be badly stressed if taken away from their friend.

It is also a good idea to include some younger animals with a suitable temperament who will help look after them. Choose carefully!

Social Bonds

Alpacas should never be socially isolated. Putting an older animal in a pen might provide it with all the food and comfort it needs, but without access to its herd, to its friends, it is very likely to be stressed and unhappy. If it is necessary to pen an alpaca, include a friend or two. If it is not safe to have them all in the same pen, then have the companions in an adjacent pen.

Veterinary Care

Like an older house pet, an aging alpaca will likely benefit from more frequent checks by your veterinarian. Minor issues which a younger animal could shrug-off might be life threatening for an older animal. Always seek advice, by phone even, if you have a concern. A small intervention, done early enough, could add years to an alpacas life.

Keep good records. Jotting down observations that seem inconsequential at the time (an animal cushing in an unusual way, or acting 'odd', etc.) might prove very helpful in knowing when the trouble started, and what other factors may be affecting the animal. You don't need to write a novel, just keep some notes.

Knowing when it is the end

Don't let an old animal suffer. It can be hard to let go. You are responsible for the welfare of your alpacas. An animal that enters a slow slide downwards into worsening health can make it too easy to justify keeping it alive. Set a clear criteria for when a humane end is the right thing to do. Many animals will tell you when they are finished with life, you just have to be willing to listen. Of our five geriatric animals that have died in the last three years four passed away naturally, and one was helped along by our skilled and compassionate veterinarian.

In conclusion

Caring for older animals does mean that you will have to occasionally sacrifice your own convenience for their welfare, and some alpaca will require more of your time than others. Keep an extra-sharp eye on the 'oldies', and knowing when and how to intervene to ensure that their quality of life is maintained is important, and rewarding.

Thanks to Vicki Cordier and Barbara Christensen (Bv.S.C.) for their feedback and assistance in writing this article.

Should alpaca breeders use SD or CV - when evaluating fibre traits?

By Paul Vallely, B Soc Sc. AAFT-Europe (27 Aug 2016).

Over the years I have operated AAFT, the question of whether to use Standard Deviation (SD) or Co-efficient of variation (CV) when evaluating fibre traits is undoubtedly one of the most commonly asked questions. It also happens to be one of the issues most plagued by misunderstanding, and consequently, carries the potential to de-rail breeding strategies, particularly those aimed at reducing the incidence of coarse fibres, increasing the level of fibre uniformity, improving the processing performance of fleeces or simply improving the style and handle of fleeces.

In writing this paper, I principally draw upon my professional experience in managing alpaca fibre measurement laboratories over the past 17 years, over 25 years practical experience with managing breeding programs aimed at genetic improvement for fleece traits (alpacas and superfine merino sheep) and having endured two years of statistics at New England University in Australia.

At this point, I should also acknowledge the contrary view put forward by Mr Cameron Holt in a paper recently published in the Australian Alpaca Association magazine ('Alpaca Myths', Alpacas Australia, Autumn and Winter 2016 ed) and British Alpaca Society magazine ('SD or CV – What's it to be', Alpaca, Spring/Summer 2016 ed). In his paper, Mr Holt appears to suggest CV is the preferred statistic to be used in fleece trait analysis. My paper should therefore be seen as offering an informed, yet alternate point of view in the spirit of professional debate, the outcome from which should surely be of potential benefit to alpaca breeders.

One of the most useful aspects of fibre testing, is the ability to measure the degree of variation in fibre diameter within a given fleece sample. Variation in fibre diameter is correlated with processing performance of fleeces, fibre alignment and handle of fleeces, micron blow-out, tensile strength and incidence of coarse fibres. Further, a major benefit in using fibre diameter variation is its high level of heritability, meaning breeders are able to achieve significant genetic gains when using this trait as a breeding objective.

For most alpacas, we find a range of about 25 micron difference between the finest fibres within a sample and the coarsest fibres within a sample. For instance, a test of a midside alpaca fibre sample may reveal an overall fibre diameter average of 25 microns, with a range in average diameter for individual fibres from 15 microns for the finest fibres to 35 microns for the coarsest fibres (although the range normally skews towards the coarse edge).

I might add that we have seen superior alpacas with histograms revealing a range of only 12 microns while we have seen alpacas with a range of over 40 microns between individual fibres within the one midside sample.

World record priced ultrafine bale (AU$10,000) used low SD as selection criteria to ensure superior levels of processing performance.

I will also add that this range in fibre diameter is repeatable over, say, the fleece's saddle area – but that's another discussion.

The two statistics we refer to when measuring variation of fibre diameter are Standard Deviation (SD) and Co-efficient of variation (CV). In saying this, however, it might also be noted that fibre test histograms provide a graphical representation of fibre diameter variation.

To consider whether to use SD or CV for the purposes of selecting breeding stock, it would be useful to manually calculate SD and CV for two imaginary samples of fibres from two different alpacas.

While we obviously use software programs to calculate these statistics, manually calculating SD and CV will reveal the true relationship these two statistics have with the actual degree of fibre diameter variation found in any fibre sample. For ease of calculation, these imaginary fibre samples will have a ridiculously small number of fibres.

Lets imagine the first sample has 5 fibres, each individual fibre with the following average diameter in microns: 18, 19, 19, 20 & 21. The AFD of this sample is therefore 19.4 microns.

'Practising what is preached' - A fleece from the author's own superfine merino flock. The ewes consistently produce fleeces such as this one due to a breeding program that prioritises SD. This fleece had AFD of 15.4 microns with SD of 2.2 microns.

Now starts the heavy mathematics lecture. To calculate SD, we use the following formula (I'll use the above example to illustrate the calculations):

1. Obtain the total of the squares for each of the data values (multiply each micron by itself then add it all up) eg 324 (18 x 18) + 361 + 361 + 400 + 441 = 1887.

2. Square the sum of the data values and divide by the number of values (add up the microns then multiply the total by that same number, then divide by the number of fibres) eg 18 + 19 + 19 + 20 + 21 = 97, thence 97 x 97 divided by 5 = 1881.8

3. Subtract 2/ from 1/, then divide the answer by the number of values less 1 (subtract the answer for 2 from the answer to 1/, then divide by the number of fibres less one) eg 1887 - 1881.8 = 5.2, thence 5.2 divided by 4 = 1.3

4. Obtain the square root of 3/ eg, the square root of 1.3 = 1.14

The SD of the sample is therefore 1.14. I might add that our fibre testing software makes these calculations for over 3000 measurements in well under a second.

Now take a another sample of fibres with exactly the same degree of variation (distribution of AFD for each fibre from the overall average) Lets say the microns of the five fibres are 23, 24, 24, 25 & 26 (AFD of 24.4).

The respective calculations for SD of this second sample are:

1. 2982
2. 2976.8
3. 1.3
4. 1.14

The SD is also 1.14. The SD is the same because they both have precisely the same degree of variation in fibre diameter.

If, on the other hand, we take a sample with a higher degree of variation in the diameter of the fibres, the SD will be higher. For example, our next fibre sample has fibres with diameters of 23, 24, 24, 25 & 29 microns. (AFD of 25.0 microns)

The respective calculations are:

1. 3147
2. 3125
3. 5.5
4. 2.3

The SD is 2.3.

At this point, it should be clear that SD is the true and unbiased indicator of variation – and let me assure you it is.

By the way, one standard deviation will effectively represent about 66% of the total variation in a sample. For instance, if the average diameter is 20 microns and the SD is 2 microns, then 66% of the total variation in the sample will lie between 18 and 22 microns, generally speaking.

This then brings us to CV.

CV is simply what percentage the SD is of the overall average. Therefore, we calculate CV by dividing the SD by the AFD and then multiply by 100. A simple example being that if the average fibre diameter of a sample is 20 microns, and the SD is 2 microns, then the CV is 10% as 2 is 10% of 20.

Using the formula for calculating CV, we find the first sample above has a CV of 5.9%, (1.14 divided by19.4 x 100) while the second sample above has a lower CV of 4.7% (1.14 divided by 24.4 x 100) even though there is exactly the same degree of variation. This is where the problem lies.

Because of the way we calculate CV, it means the higher the average fibre diameter, the lower the CV, all other things being equal. Or put another way, a low CV may be due to a high fibre diameter rather than a low degree of variation.

At this point, I draw the reader's attention to the divergence of opinion presented in this paper and the opinion expressed in Mr Holt's paper regarding the formula for calculating SD. Mr Holt states the formula for SD as being 'CV x micron divided by 1'. (P10) As shown in this paper, however, CV can only be calculated once the relevant sample's SD has been determined. It is therefore suggested Mr Holt's formula appears implausible as it relies on quite the opposite in that he claims SD can only be calculated once CV is determined.

I should also add that Mr Holt's formula is in fact quite at odds with the standard formula for SD ('Statistics Today – A Comprehensive Introduction, Byrkit, D. University of West Florida. 1987 P69).

So why do we calculate CV?

Co-efficient of variation is a commonly used statistic that enables us to compare the degree of variation between two different types of data. To illustrate, lets take the example of a foreign exchange dealer who might want to compare the movement in the US Dollar against the movement of the Euro over a period of time. In this case, a one US dollar variation is very different to a one euro variation, so we use CV to bring the variation in the two currencies to a comparable statistic. It can also be used where we need to directly relate the degree of variation to the average, for example, estimating the likely variation on the return on investment for purchasing two investments of quite different purchase amounts. In these cases, CV effectively brings everything to a level playing field.

Comparing the degree of variation in fibre diameter for two different alpacas is not a case of two different data sets, nor is it impacted by a direct relationship with the average diameter. When comparing the fleece traits of two alpacas with regard to variation, we simply want to compare how much variation is evident – that is, what is the range in diameter of the fibres between the two alpacas. To expect anything more is beyond the purpose of SD or CV.

Again, I draw the reader's attention to a divergence of opinion presented in this paper and the paper presented by Mr Holt in that he states "Comparing say a 15 micron (alpaca) with a 20, a 25 and a 30, the standard deviation would not be a reliable method for comparison" (p10).

As mentioned above, a variation in the diameter of individual fibres within a sample of, say, 40 microns cannot be viewed differently if considering such a variation on a '25 micron' alpaca compared to that of a '20 micron' alpaca. To accept the principle put forward by Mr Holt would immerse the breeder in an unnecessarily complicated method of genetic or commercial appraisal of alpacas.

At this point, I might mention that fleeces with low average fibre diameter have a propensity to also exhibit low degrees of variation in fibre diameter. I should also mention this has nothing to do with statistical calculations, but again, this is another discussion.

We shall now put the mathematics lecture behind us and look at two actual fibre tests using OFDA2000 technology on midside samples taken from two alpacas.

64B6 has an average fibre diameter of just 15.8 microns. It has an SD of 3.4 microns indicating very low variation with fibre diameter within the sample. As can be seen with the narrow histogram, this very low degree of variation is clearly evident. The CV, however, is 21.4% as 3.4 is 21.4% of 15.8.

This alpaca is considered likely to be genetically superior for breeding towards high quality, uniform and soft handling fleeces, although obviously, subjective appraisal of the alpaca would also need to be considered before making such a judgment. If using CV, this alpaca might not even appear on your radar.

Moving our attention now to alpaca 6Y40, we find it has much higher average fibre diameter at 26.3 microns. Further, we find much higher degree of variation in fibre diameter with an SD of 5.5 microns and a histogram to match. Even to the untrained observer, this alpaca has a far greater degree of variation than the previous alpaca, yet the CV is lower at 20.8%.

The reason the CV is lower has absolutely nothing to do with the degree of variation, but because the first alpaca has a much lower average fibre diameter.

Based on its fleece traits, this alpaca runs the risk of regressing a herd's genetics due to its high variation in fibre diameter and evidence of very coarse fibres. If a breeder relied on CV, this is an example of where they would make a serious mistake.

Moving away from these examples, but referring back to Mr Holt's paper, he cites the wool industry's use of CV when cataloguing sale consignments as a reason for the alpaca community to adopt CV as a selection trait.

Over the past few years, I have combined my professional roles as wool producer and owner of fibre testing laboratories to provide consultancy to the superfine wool industry. One project was to consider changing the use of CV in sale catalogues to the use of SD. While fibre metrology technicians accepted my position on the use of SD, it was considered that given wool consignments within a sale catalogue were compared with other sale lots of similar fibre diameter, the use of CV was not problematic. While we accepted this position, it clearly does not present itself as evidence in support of the use for CV with regard to animal breeding and husbandry.

In conclusion, and after having studied Mr Holt's paper, I remain firmly of the opinion that using CV may result in the infusion of inferior genetics into a breeder's herd, the effects of which may take many generations to effectively remove.

The message is abundantly clear – SD is the preferred statistic when evaluating fibre traits.

Australian Alpaca Fibre Testing
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Phone 02 48342132
Mobile 0409 550305
Fax. 02 48342132
Email. paulvallely@bigpond.com
PO Box 246
Crookwell, NSW. 2583

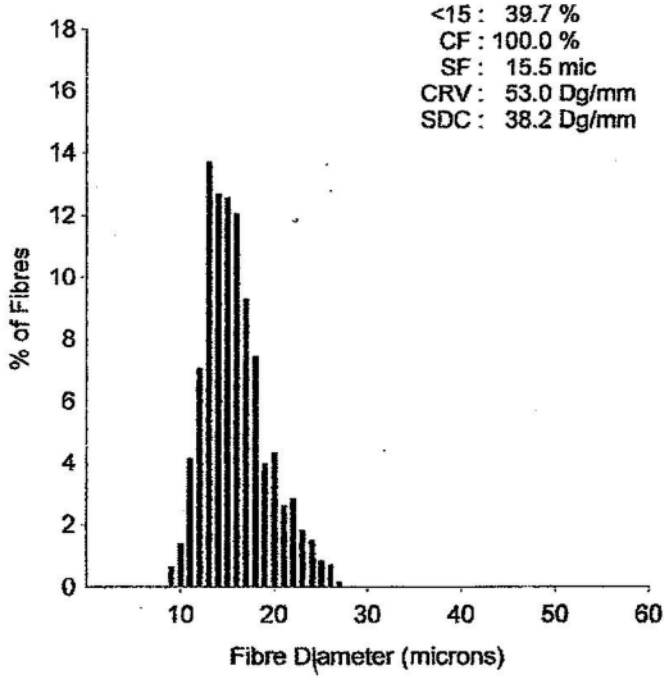
OFDA 2000 REPORT : SORTED BY TAG

[redacted] (2Records)

Job Details
Alpaca samples

Reference: 0231 - 0250
Tested: Dec 05, 2007 - Dec 12, 2007

EarTag : 6B46
Micron : 15.8 mic
SD : 3.4 mic
CVD : 21.4 %
CEM : 7.2 mic
<15 : 39.7 %
CF : 100.0 %
SF : 15.5 mic
CRV : 53.0 Dg/mm
SDC : 38.2 Dg/mm



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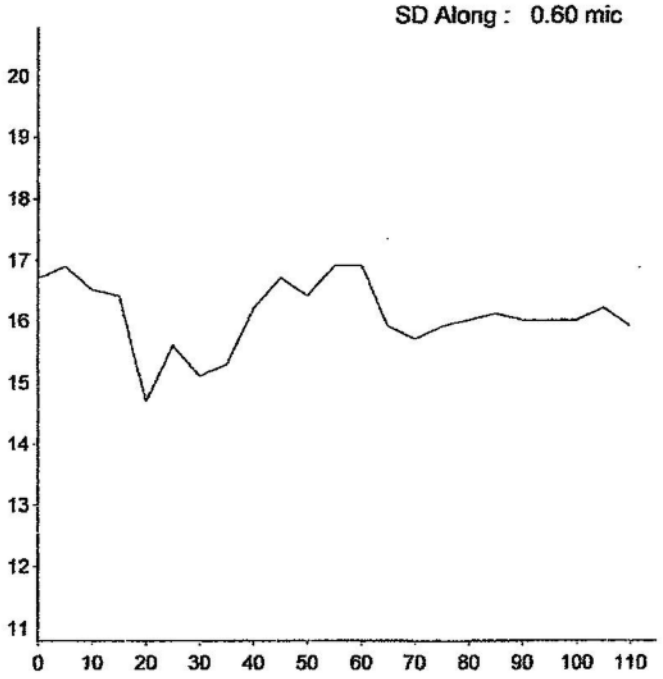
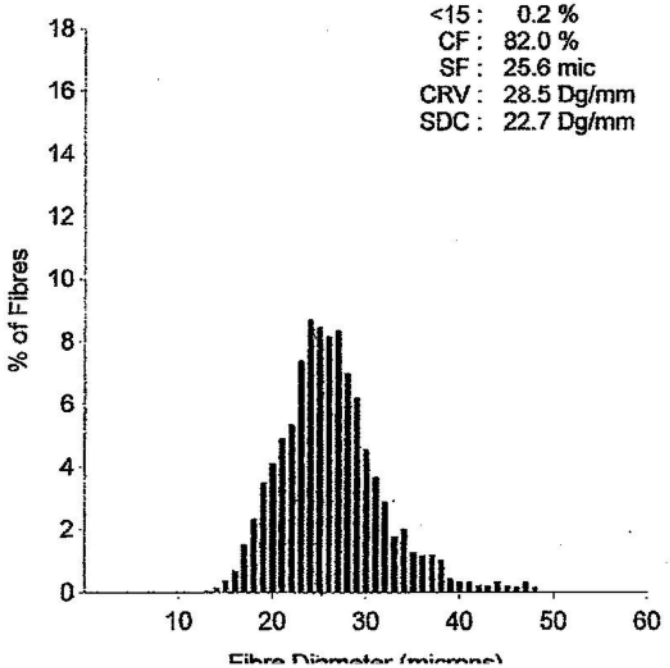
Min Mic : 14.7 mic
Max Mic : 16.9 mic
Finest Point From Tip : 20.0 mm
Fibre Ends : 0.5 mic
SD Along : 0.60 mic



EarTag : 6Y40
Micron : 26.3 mic
SD : 5.5 mic
CVD : 20.8 %
CEM : 10.8 mic
<15 : 0.2 %
CF : 82.0 %
SF : 25.6 mic
CRV : 28.5 Dg/mm
SDC : 22.7 Dg/mm



Staple Len : 85.0 mm
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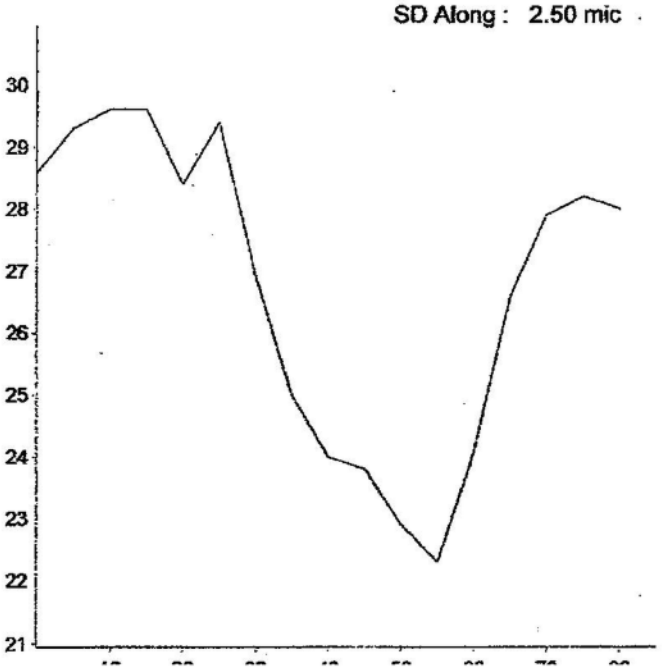
SD Along : 2.50 mic



Certificates of

Each Regional Committee can nominate one member from their Region each year for consideration by the Board.

The nomination must be in writing and received at the AAA Office by 31st July. The AAA Board may award Certificates annually to any member outside of the Regional nominations.

Criteria to be considered but not limited to:

- Length of service for the member is to be 7 years +.
- Member is to have held an Office or Leadership position over a number of years at a National and/or Regional level.
- Made a significant contribution to a successful AAA project.
- Has been actively involved in shows, regional activities / workshops.
- Volunteered their services to assist the industry via working parties/ panels/ committees.
- Written documents to support the industry's progress.
- Is committed to the long term viability and sustainability of the industry.
- Is a consistent supporter of AAA events /activities.

It is with great pleasure that the Board announce that the following members have been awarded Certificates of Appreciation for 2016 and the Board would like to thank the members for their contribution to the industry.

Ian Frith

Ian has been instrumental in taking the alpaca meat industry from a working concept to a successful commercial venture across Australia, with interest from overseas. Alpaca meat has been introduced into carefully selected restaurants where it is prepared by suitably qualified and trained chefs, to maximise receptiveness and to demonstrate the variety of cooking methods that can be utilised. Careful management of supply has maintained growth and interest, by not saturating the market and creating unsustainable demand; producers now have an alternative outlet for male alpaca that are unsuitable for breeding or fleece production, which has encouraged further breeding of stock.

In addition to promoting the meat industry, Ian also has contributed to the alpaca fleece industry by arranging production and promotion of end-product such as yarn, blankets etc.

Ian was a presenter at the 2014 National Conference, and has also spoken at numerous regional workshops and conferences.

Ian has participated in trade missions overseas, and negotiated the protocols required to facilitate export of Australian alpacas to Turkey

Ian is highly committed to the alpaca industry throughout Australia which is evidenced by his sponsorship at National, Royal and major shows in NSW including Sydney Royal Show, Charles Ledger Show annually.

Sponsorship is also provided to regional shows further afield, such as Royal Toowoomba, Murwillumbah and Colourbration. This support has been both financial and in-kind. Ian has also made himself and members of his staff available for media promotion to benefit the Australian alpaca industry.

Ian has privately funded research to assist the development of the alpaca meat industry, which has resulted in benefits to Ian's business, Prime Alpaca, and alpaca producers across Australia who have access to this published research. Ian has purchased alpacas from herds small and large across Australia, to contribute to his rapidly growing herd of over 4000 in multiple locations to maximise production.

Appreciation

Prue Walduck

Prue has recently resigned from the Showing & Judging committee as Exhibitor representative, having been a committee member for a number of years, including the Committee Chair from 2011 to 2014.

As Chair, Prue was always responsive to all communications, and her input was well considered and insightful, and her communications with fellow committee members, Judges and AAA members were respectful and diplomatic.

Prue is a member of the Central Victorian Region, and prior to her involvement on national committees, Prue held committee roles as Regional Secretary and Marketing Representative. Prior to joining S&J, Prue was a member of the National Marketing team.

Prue has been very active in organising events including the Judges Training workshop in 2011, and the Apprentice Judge Training & Assessment workshop in 2013. The recent fleece workshop held in Victoria for AAA Judges was held at Millduck, as was the Showing & Judging Reference Panel meeting in 2011.

Prue regularly exhibits at regional, state Royal and the National Show, and attended the AAA National Conference in Adelaide in 2014, and the WAC in New Zealand in 2013.

As noted by the offices held, Prue has been an active member of AAA over many years at a regional and national level and is a worthy recipient of a Certificate of Appreciation.

Alison Lee

Alison is a qualified veterinarian who is a committed volunteer to the Australian alpaca industry. Alison was appointed as the Q-Alpaca Registrar in 2010-11, and has performed this role on a voluntary basis at no cost to the AAA. She joined the Biosecurity and Animal Welfare Committee in early 2016, and is an active contributor.

Alison was instrumental in the review of the Q-Alpaca program in 2011-12 in conjunction with members of the Animal Health, Husbandry & Welfare Reference Panel, and the submission of recommendations to simplify the program and improve industry participation to Animal Health Australia.

Alison was a presenter at the 2014 National Conference held in Adelaide.

Alison has reviewed several items relating to the BAW portfolio and engaged with members of the Camelid Veterinary Association to obtain feedback from practising vets with alpaca experience to inform recommendations and communications to AAA members.

Alison is committed to the Australian alpaca industry and is an active contributor in the area of animal health and the Board would like to thank her for her contribution.

Elizabeth (Libby) Garner

Libby was the Chair of the Animal Health Husbandry & Welfare Committee prior to being elected as an AAA Director in 2006. Whilst an AAA Director Libby was the Director responsible for the AHH&W portfolio, liaising with AHA and other government departments. When her term as Director concluded in 2009 Libby continued as a member of AHH&W, resuming the role of Chair.

Libby has continued as a member of this committee, submitting an Expression of Interest in the revised Biosecurity & Animal Welfare Committee in late 2015, and recently stepped aside as Chair due to personal circumstances impacting on her capacity to address this responsibility to the standard she expected of herself.

In 2012 Libby completed the necessary training and achieved the required competencies to represent the alpaca industry/AAA as an Industry Liaison Officer in the event of an Emergency Animal Disease.

Libby was a member of the working party for the implementation of NLIS for South American Camelids.
Libby was involved in the transition of the Q-Alpaca program from its initiator and inaugural Registrar, Dr Richard Dixon, to Dr Nicky Stone due to Dr Dixon's declining health in 2007. Libby was also involved in the review of the Q-Alpaca program in 2011-12 in conjunction with Alison Lee and Margaret Dorsch, and the submission of recommendations to simplify the program and improve industry participation to Animal Health Australia.

Over many years Libby has provided technical support to the AAA office staff on Animal Health, Husbandry and Biosecurity matters, including Q-Alpaca, and where necessary responding to enquiries regarding Animal Health and Welfare issues across Australia.
Libby authored numerous articles for Alpacas Australia on matters of Animal Health, in addition to Q-Alpaca FAQ's, newsletter content and other communications to members.

Most recently Libby has reviewed several items relating to the BAW portfolio, and prepared a communication to AAA members regarding the contents of a commercially prepared feed mix marketed as suitable for alpaca. Libby has been a regular exhibitor at alpaca shows in NSW.

Libby has held numerous roles over the years and recently confirmed her availability and willingness to represent the alpaca industry as an ILO if required. She continues to be a contributor in the area of animal health, and is a deserving recipient of a Certificate of Appreciation.

Darryl & Fiona Laughton

Darrell and Fiona have been committed to the alpaca industry over many years. Fiona has been a committee member of the Qld Region and held numerous roles in support of regional activities over a number of years. Fiona was Regional President from 2013 - 2015, when she resigned due to the ill-health of Darrell. Darrell judged the Craft Section of the National Show held in Tamworth in October 2010.

For many years Darrell and Fiona have been active in convening and participating in regional events including shows, educational workshops and new breeders workshops. They have been supporters of Shows held across Queensland, and attended the National Show. They have been involved promoting the alpaca industry at agricultural field days and by supporting the inclusion of school students through involvement with the school programs in Qld.

Darrell was awarded the Champion Spinning Exhibit (for suri fleece) at the Royal Queensland Show in consecutive years, and has also been recognised at the AAA National Show for his spinning. Several of their suri creations - produced from suri fleece spun by Darrell and then knitted or crocheted by Fiona have received recognition locally and internationally.

Both Fiona and Beaver have written a variety of articles published in Regional, National and I
international newsletters and journals. Topics have included husbandry, product development and handcrafts.

The outstanding attribute which Fiona and Beaver can be tagged with is - selfless. They have given of their time, knowledge and expertise in order to further the development of the alpaca industry within the Queensland Region. In October 2016 Beaver lost his battle with cancer and his enthusiasm will be sorely missed by his friends in the alpaca industry.

Wayne McCauley

Wayne has been a member of AAA since 1999. During this time he has been committee member and treasurer for six years (200-2006). He has been the regional representative on the Royal Agricultural Society Committee which organises the Sydney Royal Easter Show for fourteen years and the RAS committee treasurer for thirteen years. He has been either ring steward or marshall at numerous RAS or National shows and convenor of the Regional Spring Show for several years and assisted in establishing the New England Alpaca Show as well as being involved in the Tocal Field Day display for five years.

Wayne has supported junior competitions over a ten year period and junior judging for the last five years.

Wayne is committed to the long term viability and sustainability of the industry and the Certificate of Appreciation recognises the appreciation of the region and the Association in general for his industry commitment.

Pauline Glasser

In 2005 Pauline Glasser purchased some alpacas for her husband Colin as a 50th Birthday gift. Coming from a career as an Art Teacher with a love of textiles, her love and involvement with alpacas commenced. Pauline and Colin Glasser became members of the Australian Alpaca Association on July 1st 2006.

Pauline involved herself in the committee quite soon after becoming a member of the AAA and in 2010 became the Editor of the SQNNSW regional newsletter/magazine – a position which she still holds and enjoys immensely.

Pauline was the Fleece Liaison Officer for the SQNNSW region for many years – a position she held in conjunction with her role on the National Showing and Judging Panel. Pauline is still an active member of this panel. As part of her role on the Showing & Judging Panel, Pauline was assigned the task of preparing and implementing the Convenor Resources Workshop manual, an arduous task as it was written from scratch.

Pauline's love of alpaca fleece and textiles opened up opportunities for her to become a Fleece Coordinator at Alpaca shows. With Pauline's excitement and enthusiasm for the role – she easily found herself a group of likeminded members who would become the 'SQNNSW fleece team'. The regional fleece team (with Pauline as the coordinator) have transported, counted, prepared, weighed and sorted fleece for judges at a variety of venues such as the National Sale and Show, Royal Queensland Show, Toowoomba Royal Show, Grafton Show and various other shows over many years.

Pauline and her husband Colin are the Convenors of the Grafton Show and have been for ten successful years.
Pauline has held a variety of fleece related workshops and training days in her own home for AAA members and textile lovers. Pauline and her husband Colin are regular visitors at Grafton elderly Citizens homes where they take alpacas into the premises for 'therapy' for the elderly. Promoting alpacas as therapeutic aids.

Pauline is an extremely active member of the South Queensland, Northern NSW Region, you will always find Pauline at Regional Shows, Alpaca Displays, Agricultural shows, Alpaca Workshops, she always attends regional meetings (no matter where they are held).
Pauline and her husband always participate in Australian Alpaca Week - they attract hundreds of visitors with their enticing view and Devonshire teas. Pauline generally holds the open day on Mother's Day so "Mother's Day overlooking the Clarence River whilst having a Devonshire tea" has become quite a popular event in the region - there are often stories about the event published in the local newspaper.

Pauline is a wonderful regional member and an active advocate for the Australian alpaca industry, always has a smile on her face and is constantly eager and willing to help or assist anyone. Pauline deserves the Certificate of Appreciation award and will be humbled by it as she does not do what she does for recognition, it is for the love of the alpaca!

Chris & Tara Ravenhill

Chris and Tara are current committee members of the WA Region and both have undertaken numerous additional roles for the Region over a number of years. Chris has convened the Perth Royal Show for the past 10 years with Tara as an assistant and part of the RAS Alpaca sub committee over that time. They are also committee members of the WA Colourbration show.

They have for many years been very active in convening Region events including showing, fleece & new breeders workshops. They have, and continue to be, major sponsors of WA Region Shows as well as promoting the alpaca industry at Agricultural field days. Chris and Tara are highly committed to the alpaca industry throughout Australia shown by their attendance and sponsorship at the National and interstate shows including the Royal Sydney Show annually. The Region has no hesitation in recommending both Chris and Tara for certificate of appreciation awards. They are considered truly worthy of such an award.

Dale & Melanie Brown

Dale and Melanie Brown have been members of the Association since 2006 and have been active members of the regional committee of the AAA NSW Central Western Regional Committee since joining. During their joint membership of the Association Dale and Melanie have been joint newsletter editors and have produced the region's Alpacachat newsletter since 2010. Melanie has also served on the committee as the Regional Marketing Representative. In that capacity she organised the Region's first public event for the then National Alpaca Week and successfully promoted the Regions activities and events to the public via various Regional media outlets.

In addition to serving on the committee and serving as a joint newsletter editor, Dale has held the office of Vice President in 2013 and 2014 and has been the region's president for the last 2 years, 2015 and 2016. In these last 2 roles Dale has represented the AAA NSW Central Western Region at President's Council and National Council. Dale and Melanie are consistent and active supporters and often the organisers of the region's education and training activities and industry events and promotions. They have now arranged various training activities including the rollout of the recent Fleece preparation training within the Central Western Region. They hosted the first of these workshops in their own shearing shed.

In addition to organising and participating in several Australian Alpaca Week displays in various locations over the last 5 years they have also organised the Region's annual alpaca association displays at the Mudgee Small Farm Field Days an event which attracts audiences of up to 28,000 people across 2 days.

Since joining the Association Dale and Melanie have assisted with, and exhibited at, the Regions shows at Bathurst and in Mudgee. They are also regular exhibitors at shows further afield such as Goulburn, The Hawkesbury, the Charles Ledger and at Boorowa. This year Melanie was the Show Convenor for the Region's Winter Wonderland Show in Mudgee.

Dale and Melanie promote all aspects of the Australian alpaca industry and to this end their activities on behalf of the region have extended to arranging food stalls at local food fairs such as Rylstone Street Feast and Mudgee Street Feast, an Illawarra Prime degustation dinner at Blue Wren Winery in Mudgee and an alpaca tasting menu for an Australian Alpaca Week event at Mudgee Racecourse. Our region is in the heart of fine wool production and grazing country. The local market understands natural fibre and high quality woollen textiles and It is essential to promote all aspects of alpaca production but particularly meat where graziers are a potential market.

In addition I would add that Dale and Melanie are always generous and welcoming in their support for new and existing members. This year they have instigated a series of social dinner events that have been rotated through various centres in the region. These are fostering a very friendly atmosphere and adding to the camaraderie amongst alpaca breeders in the NSW Central Western Region.

eAlpaca

The new online registry, transaction and show system for AAA members

By Fiona Vanderbeek

At last… what so many of our members have been wanting for so long is finally on the way. eAlpaca will be with us by the middle of this year. Here's an overview of the Why, What, How and When of the new online registry and show system.

Why do we need a new system?

In 2013-14, as part of the strategic marketing plan, AAA ran a member survey that included questions about the IAR database. Members indicated they wanted additional functionality, in particular the ability to do transfers online, self-manage herd updates and have an online show entry system.

This theme was repeated when the Member Services Working Party conducted a survey in 2015, resulting in the Board's decision to undertake a more detailed analysis of needs and expectations.

Early last year all AAA members were invited to participate in a survey looking in detail at exactly what you would like a new system to offer. The key findings were that you want to be able to do transfers online (91% said they would be Likely or Very Likely to use this function), self-manage updates to animal and personal information (93% Likely or Very Likely) and have an online show entry system (89% of those entering shows would be Likely or Very Likely to use this function).

Other frequently mentioned requirements were: a system that is simple and intuitive to use; an in-breeding calculator which is easy to use and understand; online transaction payments; and electronic registration certificates that can be printed when required. And, of course, a reduction in fees.

After a thorough review of the options available, the Board contracted with Nathan Bailey of Simplify Solutions to custom build an entirely new system to meet all the very specific requirements of the alpaca industry in general and you, the AAA members, in particular.

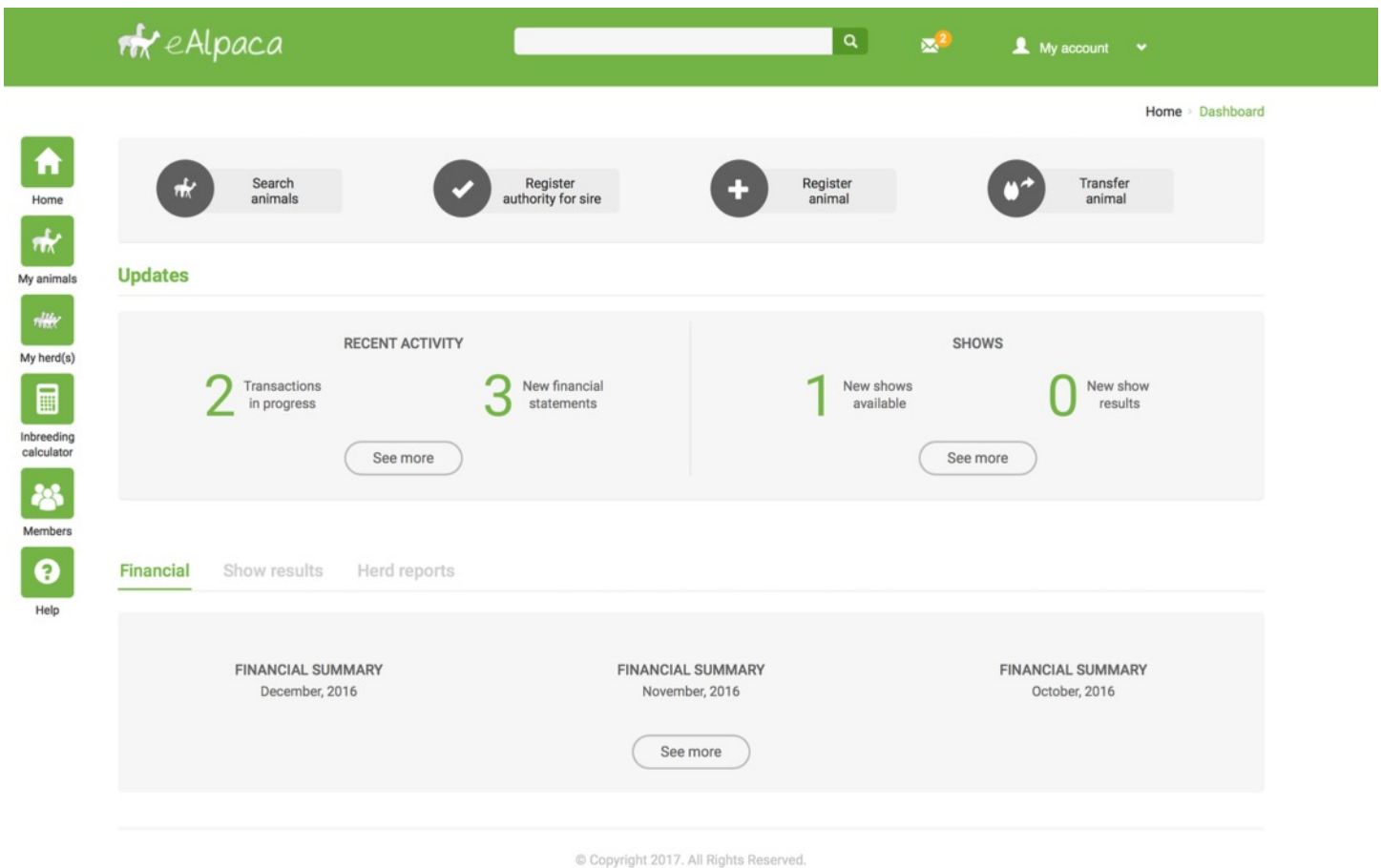


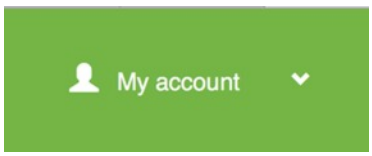
Figure 1

What will it do?

When you go to the eAlpaca website (directly or via a link from the AAA website) you will be able to log in securely to your own member dashboard screen (which will work equally well on a desktop, laptop, mobile device or phone) to easily navigate around all the system's functions.

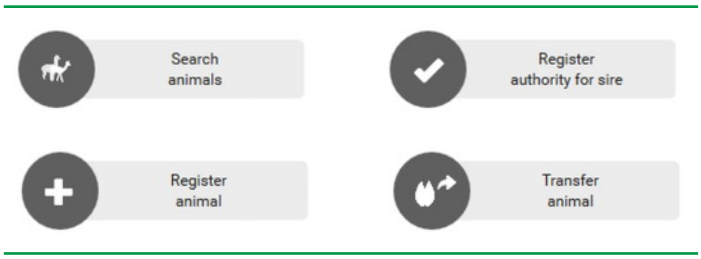
Figure 1 shows what your dashboard screen may look like (as every step of the system design is being tested by a group of AAA members, this will continue to evolve to maximise usability and intuitive navigation).

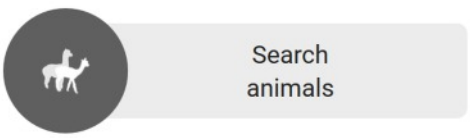
Here's an overview of some of the key features of the system:



Within the My Account section you will be able to:

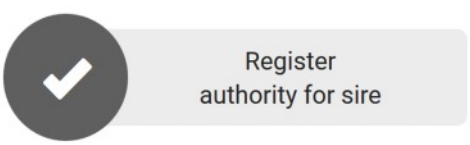
- renew or upgrade your membership;
- change your password;
- edit information such as your email address, phone number, address or website;
- manage other settings within your account.



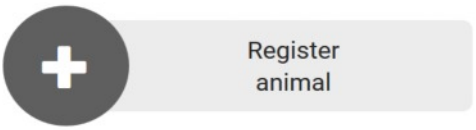


You can use this to:

- Search for a specific animal by name or IAR number
- Search for a range of animals meeting specific criteria (sex, breed, age, colour, owner location etc)

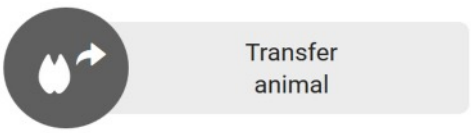


Complete a simple electronic form to register one or more sire authorities for matings done by your males to females owned by another breeder. The system will both notify you if a sire authority has been requested by another member, and notify them once it has been completed.



A quick and simple electronic form to register one cria or a large batch of cria. Some of the new features include:

- if you do not own the sire and a Sire Authority (A4) has not already been generated, a request will automatically be emailed to the sire's owner for completion;
- automatic generation of the cria's Identification Number (you just enter the Drop Number);
- the system will not allow you to use an IAR tag number which has not been allocated to you (to prevent typing errors);
- if you own multiple herds you can switch between herd codes without logging out;
- you can record males as "Inactive Male" free of charge (with the ability to upgrade them to Active at a later date) if they are not likely to be used for breeding or entered in shows;
- you can choose whether to receive registration certificates by email or store them electronically to print when required – for those who would like a printed certificate sent by mail this will remain an option, but an additional fee will apply.



All steps in an animal transfer can be completed electronically, with the option for the transfer fee to be paid by the seller or the purchaser. As soon as a transfer is undertaken, the animal will be moved to the purchaser's herd – however, if the purchaser is due to pay the transfer fee, the animal will remain in a de-activated state until the fee is paid and transfer is completed. Expect to see some fee reductions, including "early-bird" transfer fees and reductions for group purchases or sales.

My animals

Here you will find a list of all the animals you own. When you click on a specific animal in your herd you will be able to:

- view the animal's pedigree, progeny, show results and ownership history;
- edit details such as status, colour and castration;
- enter public or private notes on the animal (eye colour, toenail colour etc).

You will also be able to access functions such as registering a sire authority or entering the animal in a show. This screen will also allow you to submit a request for the certification of a male – your vet will be able to log into the system in order to complete the forms electronically once the physical examination of the alpaca has been undertaken.

My herd(s)

This section will provide you with:

- a range of herd reports/statistics;
- a herd inventory (a quick way to do bulk updates of status changes);
- the facility to register a new herd;
- the ability to undertake a bulk transfer of animals from your herd to that of another member.

Also in this section is everything related to Q-Alpaca: registration/renewal and all the forms. Provided you have updated the status of your animals (sales, births, deaths etc) the system will assist you to complete the annual stock return. Your vet will be able to log in to complete and submit post-mortem report details, to ensure Q-Alpaca can provide detailed and timely reporting on emerging issues in the national herd.

Inbreeding calculator

A common theme in the member survey was the lack of user-friendliness of the current in-breeding calculator…. So, we are designing an entirely new and easy to use one… which will include an explanation of what the results mean. You will be able to look up the Inbreeding Coefficient for a specific animal or enter some combinations of sires and dams to see whether that is a breeding you want to undertake.

Members

This will allow you to:

- Search for a specific member by name
- Search for a member or members by herd prefix, herd code, region or postcode

Also on the dashboard you will receive regular updates on recent activity – transactions that are in progress, financial statements and information on shows that are available for entry.

For those members who participate in shows, you will be able to do all your show entries online, see when upcoming shows are open for entries and view show results.

If you are someone who convenes shows, you will be able to perform all the necessary functions around creating a show, accepting entries, producing catalogues, lists, score cards and labels via the system.

How is it happening?

This is an enormous step for the alpaca industry in Australia and as such a great deal of work is going into every stage of design, building, testing and implementation.

The design phase began with the invaluable feedback from the member survey, which then fed into the creation of a very detailed 200+ page design specification for the system. At various stages in the creation of the specification input was sought from specialists such as show convenors, vets and the Q-Alpaca registrar, along with the AAA office staff and numerous AAA members. One of the key challenges and goals is to design a system that suits as many of our members as possible, from hobbyists to commercial farmers, and across the entire spectrum of computer users (including those who rarely use a computer).

An early prototype was demonstrated at the 2016 National Show in Adelaide. The feedback from that initial display was overwhelmingly positive and gave us a very clear indication that we were on track to meet members' requirements. Suggestions from members visiting the stand have been incorporated into the specification.

With that phase complete, we are now in the cycle of building and testing. To ensure the system is easy and intuitive to use and has all the required functionality, the software is built in stages. Each stage is user-tested and refined with a sample group of members. Our testers have been selected from respondents to the original survey who indicated a willingness to help, and represent a cross-section of our membership. As each element of the system is built, other relevant groups, such as vets and show convenors are being consulted.

When is it happening?

Implementation of the new system is scheduled for late July 2017. We understand that this is a big change, and we're planning a series of detailed communications to prepare and equip members for the change.

This article is meant to provide a general overview only; in coming months, as each section of the system completes its testing, we will ensure you get more detailed updates, via e-blasts and the AAA's website and Facebook page. You can also speak to your Regional President who will have seen a demonstration of the prototype system at the February Council meeting; and during the first six months of 2017 there will be Regional roadshows and displays at the larger shows.

Colours of the Dream

By Elizabeth Paul, Erehwon Alpacas

In the course of my research into alpaca colour genetics, I have often wondered what were the major colours in the time of the Incas. They were reputed to have had store houses each full of a single colour, but the Spanish invaders were only interested in finding gold, not fibre or cloth, and burnt them. The Incas had no written language to leave records, and even if they had, these might have been destroyed as well. So we can't be really sure what the mix of colours were, or numbers of each, at that time. The South American herd has however, gone through a number of transformations in the last 150 years that we know of.

The First Imports

Ledger had begun breeding alpacas in Peru, in 1848, ten years before he made his exportation to Australia. In December 1858, some 256 alpacas under the care of Charles Ledger, were landed in Sydney. They were not the first, or the last, shipment into Australia in the early years. They were however, probably the largest live group, to be landed.

In brief, Ledger took six years and endured many hardships in order to bring this large herd of alpacas from Peru to Australia. He was meticulous in their care, training them to eat dried lucerne hay, for the arduous three month sea journey. He even brought Indian herdsmen with him, to manage the alpacas properly, and sent these men back to South America at his own expense, after they had trained Europeans in the herd management.

While still in South America, he carried out breeding experiments, crossing alpacas with llamas. His intention was to breed up more alpacas by back crossing, since it was becoming more difficult to get purebred alpacas due to the Peruvian authorities' ban on exporting them. He also acquired a number of orphaned vicunas for crossing, raising them on llama mothers after sacrificing the llama crias.

However, one thing he appears not to have done, nor anyone else, is to record the actual colours of the alpacas he was breeding. He may have done so in his own notes or diaries, but it is not mentioned in Gramiccia's book. Indeed, apart from a reference to the practice of sacrificing a black male alpaca each morning as a sun offering, and a grey male in times of war, there are almost no references to alpaca colour in the whole book. The colour makeup of Ledger's herd might still remain a mystery if not for the delightful watercolour paintings and drawings made, apparently, by the son of his faithful servant Manuel. These are simple but by no means crude, and are detailed enough to enable the observer to clearly distinguish between individual alpacas, horses, mules and dogs.

If the paintings are magnified, and the alpacas counted in their colours, then at least two thirds of them, in the most numerous groups, are coloured black. The indigenous artist, with no preconceived ideas, has presumably drawn and painted, whatever was in front of him. Other colours can be identified, including white, tan with black face, and silver grey, but the majority are black. There is even, in one painting, a pair of miniscule black alpacas mating in the far distance. When the alpacas were landed in Sydney, a local newspaper carried a drawing of two alpacas on Australian soil – one clearly black, the other apparently dark brown. For lack of any other records, I will assume that these drawings are an accurate representation of the colours in Ledger's herd.

Black is generally a recessive colour, and blacks are really only produced, in any numbers from black x black, or black x dark matings. Therefore, if Ledger had mostly blacks, we could assume that the South American herd at the time, consisted largely of dark animals, not light ones. I would have expected more fawn/brown shades in the local population.

In these references, there are only a few other notes on alpaca colours at the time. Four black alpacas were recorded as having been landed at Port Lincoln in South Australia, in 1857. A letter published at the time, regarding this interesting event, lists the usual alpaca colours as 'grey, white, black and mottled " and llamas as "brown, with shades of black and yellow". The South Australian ones must have survived and presumably produced young, since two black ones were recorded as being shown in 1867.

To summarise, it appears that, whatever the national herd colours were during the time of the Incas, at the time of these exports, it was a coloured herd with many dark animals. If this was the case, then sacrificing a black male every day, would be commonplace rather than wasteful. It might also provide one answer to the question of why the introduction of alpacas to Australia failed at the time, if they were in competition with white sheep.

How long did they last?

Over his six year mission, Ledger had nearly 1000 alpacas and crosses, but he only landed about 250 animals in 1858. He also lost a few on the voyage over. Of these, 84 were pure alpacas, 43 female alpaca/llama crossbreds, 4 male and one female vicuna and a wether llama pack animal. Some 49 crias (or "lambs" as they were called then) were born shortly after arrival. By April 1859 he had 291, but lost about 50 during the dry autumn. By February 1860 their numbers had increased to 349. In May 1862, Ledger handed over supervision of the alpacas to his brother Arthur, while he, Charles, was preparing for another trip to South America. In Ledger's letter of 1874, he states that he handed over 429. However, at this point, an epidemic skin disease (possibly sarcoptic mange) killed about 60. Also, there was a severe drought, which particularly affected the females in lamb (his description) and young ones, reducing the numbers. He had completed a number of post mortems and noted that they had "congestion on the lungs". If he had large numbers of black or dark alpacas, I consider it a strong possibility that a number of them went down with rickets, and

subsequently developed pneumonia. Pregnant females and weanlings are particularly susceptible to rickets, during and after a drought.

According to Gramiccia, the sale of about 300 animals took place on 23 June 1863. (Note: This date is recorded in Lock's article as 23 June 1864 – I am not sure which is correct.)

Of these, there were about 100 pure alpacas or close enough. Many of the others were llamas or llama crosses and not suitable for breeding purposes. Most of the animals were not sold at this time, and they were then dispersed for free. However, according to Lock's research the unsold animals were held at Wingello, until 1866, when another sale of 101 animals was held. This consisted mostly of pure alpaca males and cross bred females, and all lots were sold. This sale is not mentioned in Gramiccia's book, presumably as by this time, Ledger was back in Peru and concerning himself with cinchona bark for the extraction of quinine, as a malaria treatment.

Some alpacas were exhibited in 1879 by T Holt, who had bought from the original auction. In 1884, Ledger and his second wife returned to Goulburn, where according to Gramiccia, Edward Payten still had a number of a number of pet alpacas. It is unknown, if these were pure bred alpacas or llama crosses. After this time, both the records, and the animals, fade out. If these dates are correct, then the venture lasted about 26 years in Australia.

With all the problems, political dissent and final dispersal of the herd, there was no chance that a proper breeding program could be followed. After Ledger's (and others) ill fated exportation, the Peruvian Government enforced the embargo on exporting alpacas.

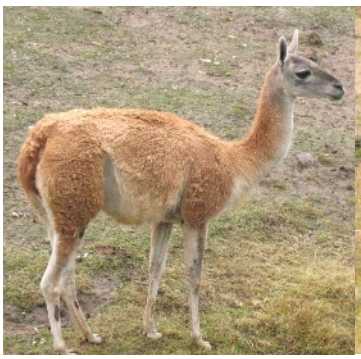
The 'whitening" of the South American herd

The next phase of changing the colour began in the mid 20th century. Escobar's book was published in 1984 and his comments on colour breeding represent possibly the only official notes available from South America at the time. Until fairly recently, most of the official records of years of breeding, have been lost, due to internal guerrilla activities. According to Escobar, the whitening of the national herd was achieved by placing groups of non white females with a white sire, and returning all white or white-spotted crias to white for subsequent matings. This is a slow process since white itself, is not (despite popular belief) the dominant fleece colour. It also leads to the creation of many white-spotted or broken coloured alpacas. He also noted that mating white to colour, at least initially, results in far more coloured crias than white ones. This observation tallies with my own research into the mating results of the Australian herd.

Escobar also makes some interesting comments on fixing the 'cinnamon' or tan colour of vicunas, into the alpaca herd. This could not have been difficult, since paco vicunas, the progeny of vicunas crossed with alpacas, look like sturdier vicunas. They have the same medium fawn fleece colour, and their heads look like vicunas. The wild vicuna and guanaco patterns of fawn fleece with white underbelly dominate over domestic colours.

My own research into the present colours of the Australian herd, indicate currently that of progeny born, there are about 30% white, 15% black and 50% of some shade of fawn or brown. Who knows what proportions of colours we might have had, if Ledger's dream had been realised at the time.

Below Left - Wild Guanaco. Below Right - There are occasional alpacas, with an exaggerated vicuna like pattern.



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A Healthy Partnership

The Animal and Veterinarian Science work experience program at Stansbury Alpacas

By Steve Marshall - Stansbury Alpacas

The morning dew was still evident and glistening across the pasture in the sun on a crisp October morning. I headed out across the property with four Adelaide University, Veterinary Science students to round up the alpacas. Walking out along a track, around past a small dam we were discussing how to approach a herd of alpacas and manage their movement calmly and efficiently.

Over the next rise we caught the first glimpse of the main herd grazing around the edge of another dam. As we approached the alpacas they gently lifted their heads, acknowledging we were there as the students were excitedly talking about the gorgeous scene they had encountered. While the four Veterinary Science students with me had previously taken turns in handling a few alpacas at the Roseworthy Campus, the "on farm" experience was already developing their appreciation and love for alpacas.

It started several years ago with just one or two Veterinary Science students placed for a week at a time to gain experience in animal handling. Since that time Stansbury Alpacas has developed a great relationship with The University of Adelaide, School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences based at Roseworthy Campus hosting students for work experience each year. It has now progressed to hosting up to four students for a week, a couple of times per year and still not being able to keep up with the number of placement requests.

The on-farm alpaca experience is highly valuable for students as they learn how to handle alpacas. Equally, it is also of great benefit to alpaca breeders as the extra pairs of hands lighten the load while getting through some tasks that would otherwise take much more time. However, perhaps the greatest benefit is the sharing of knowledge and experiences as the students gain a very practical understanding of alpaca related issues and build the capacity of Veterinarians across Australia.

A typical placement at Stansbury Alpacas would be 8:30 to 5:00, Monday to Friday although we have also negotiated placements where students attend just one day per fortnight to fit around study and work. While placement dates can be negotiated throughout the year, I usually aim for October with the main focus of the placement being shearing and halter training. The students from Adelaide University have always been very keen to get involved and gain as much hand on experience and knowledge as they are able. Understanding general stock movement is where we start, taking students for a walk in the paddock and teaching about where to stand and how to approach alpacas to direct livestock where they wanted and then providing handling experience in yards. Shearing is the most valuable time to have a few extra sets of hands and certainly fits with the students intentions of gaining hands on experience with livestock. Students are involved in drafting alpacas, loading them onto shearing tables, shearing, collecting and sorting fleece, trimming toe nails, grinding teeth, giving injections, maintaining shearing and health records and even sharpening shearing combs and cutters.

Halter training is also a very time intensive task where students are able to provide excellent assistance. The last group of students, two on shearing and swapping every few hours with two on halter training managed to halter train 35 weanlings to a high standard in just five days. The time spent handling and desensitising weanlings to being touched on the first day enables the students to get to know the characteristics and personalities of individual alpacas. Vet students really start falling in love with alpacas when handling weanlings and this assists them greatly in understanding and handling that occasionally uncooperative alpaca on the shearing table.

Of course as an educator myself, I could not resist the opportunity to run a tutorial session every day to develop the alpaca knowledge of the students from an alpaca breeder's perspective. Over a rather extended lunch each day we discussed all things alpaca from the AAA IAR data base, breeding systems, mating, embryo transfer, birthing, alpaca nutrition, fleece characteristics, showing and various health issues such as parasite management. The sharing of information at this time has been highly valuable both to myself as an alpaca breeder and the students whom were thirsty for knowledge about alpacas and took the opportunity to have many questions answered. At the end of a week students often make

comment about their time on farm being the very best work experience placement they have experienced.

I remember calling a vet for an alpaca twenty years ago and having to explain a lot about the alpaca because the vet had never touched one before. Fortunately, we are well past this with excellent support to the alpaca industry by very experienced veterinarians whom have taken an active approach to learning about alpacas. Animal and Veterinary Science courses have changed to include the study of alpacas since their introduction in Australia in about 1990. However, there may be more that we are able to do as an alpaca industry to further support Animal and Veterinary Science students in becoming more knowledgeable and confident with handling alpacas by the time they graduate.

If interested in assisting your local university with student placement, I would encourage any alpaca breeder to explore becoming involved in the program and if you do not have enough work for a week you may be able to team up with another breeder to provide the experience.

Everyone is a winner when you work as a team.

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