

# Alpaca Guide to Welfare

## LAND AND ACCOMMODATION

Alpacas can thrive on poor pastures in their natural habitat, but will benefit from better pasture. Alpacas are not susceptible to foot rot but they should not be kept on excessively wet ground or ground where there is a complete absence of dry area. They are hardy and often prefer to winter out regardless of the weather. However free access to open fronted shelter in open windswept locations is essential. This will also offer summer shade if suitable hedging or trees are not available.

In large fields, a large catch pen area should also be made, around a corner or in front of the field shelter. Daily feed routines within this area will ensure easy catching of the alpaca for training, routine husbandry or veterinary care. Electric tape fencing can be useful for internal partitioning of pasture. Electric netting should be avoided as alpacas can become entangled. Barbed wire should be replaced.

Although Alpacas are excellent jumpers, they rarely do so unless frightened, cornered, or if there is inadequate pasture in their field. Post and rail or stock fencing to a height of four feet is adequate. Some form of stock fence will be required along the lower rails during the weaning off of cria. Alpacas are grazers and browsers and should be provided with sufficient room to graze, browse, roam and play.

In the grass growing season on good pasture, alpacas may be stocked up to 15 per acre provided that fresh grazing is available to allow one area of ground to rest and recover whilst the alpaca group grazes a fresh pasture. During winter, stocking rates should be reduced to about 6 per acre and they should have free ad lib. access to soft hay or haylage.

Young males should be removed from a female group or mature entire males well before their first birthday. They may be happily run with geldings. Mature males can fight especially after working. Care should be taken when new entire males are introduced to the group that they integrate without bullying. Maturing females should be separated from entire males from 8 months of age.

## TRANSPORT

The vehicle or trailer must be suitable for the transport of animals with the height high enough for alpacas to stand. Travelling time must be monitored and a maximum journey time of 9 hours in 24 hours must be adhered to as per the Animal Transportation Act and the current regulations in effect at the time. Alpacas usually lie down while travelling and so should not be tied to the side of the trailer. Adequate space should be provided at all times as well as adequate stops, to allow the cria to suckle and alpacas to be watered and offered hay - this must be allowed during journeys over 4 hours. Females should not be moved within the last two months of pregnancy. (Take note of your mating dates). Entire males and females should be separated by a solid partition.

## FEEDING

Alpacas require a low protein (14-16%) coarse mix as a supplement to their diet for all youngsters and pregnant / lactating females and working herdsires. Typical feeding rates are 250 to 500 gms per day. Avoid overfeeding as obesity can be problematic especially in breeding females. Alpacas should be monitored for body score on a regular basis. They have a requirement for copper, zinc and selenium which can be found in specialist alpaca feeds available from a number of sources. They will not compete with other live stock at the feed troughs, so sole access is essential during feeding. A clean water supply is essential at all times. Water troughs will need emptying and cleaning during the summer period.

Alpacas should not be grazed where they have access to toxic plants, these include yew, rhododendrons, ragwort, laburnum, laurel, bracken and fern.

## HEALTH

Alpacas are on the whole hardy and healthy animals that suffer from very few health problems. However, like any livestock, on occasion they can be subject to ill health and disease. A regular programme of daily inspection is essential. Observation of the alpaca's normal behaviour, habits and posture are invaluable guides to their well being or otherwise. A sick alpaca is likely to spend more time sitting or lying stretched out and be reluctant to get up. They will get left behind as the rest of the herd moves on and can often look hunched up and depressed.

Veterinary help should be called if there is any doubt as to the health or wellbeing of an alpaca. The British Alpaca Society maintains a list of veterinarians with practical knowledge of alpacas to whom reference can be made by your own vet. Routine husbandry should include 6 monthly prophylactic worming and vaccination with seven in one clostridial vaccine such as Heptovac. Suitable wormers are those based on Ivermectin or Fenbendazole and all group animals should be treated at the same time. Ivermectin products will have the extra advantage of also treating some external parasites. Nail trimming should be done as needed, but generally 3 times per year. Most alpacas will need shearing annually during which time attention can be given to the trimming of the teeth, if required. Cria should be vaccinated at 4 weeks and a booster given at 8 weeks. From then, they should fall into the regular schedule of the adult herd. Worming of cria is normally commenced at weaning. Late born cria can be given A,D and E vitamin boosters in the autumn as a precaution against rickets. Heavy fleeced animals should have their fibre trimmed around the tail and down the rear legs to avoid faeces and urine contamination.

## **BREEDING**

Alpacas are induced ovulators and as such can be mated at any time. On average, gestation is eleven and a half months and it is recommended that mating be timed to ensure late spring or early summer birthdays. Young females are ready to be put to a stud male only when they have reached 60% of the weight of their mother or are 14 months old. Following a normal birth and complete cleansing within 12 hours of birth, a female should be in a fit condition to return to a male from 10-14 days post partum. It is known that some males are able to breed from about 9 months of age, however, this is not normally possible until the male is between 2 to 3 years old.

The selection of stud males is an important decision that has to be made which will have a major influence on the quality of the offspring.

Cria should be weaned at around 6 months of age.

## **HANDLING**

Alpacas are intelligent with good memories and the ability to reason. Handle with gentle persuasion rather than bully tactics. If confused or frightened alpacas will lie down. Relieve the stress and they will stand up. Alpacas can be halter trained if taught with kindness and understanding during brief and frequent sessions. Always begin in a small grass paddock and resist all temptation to put pressure on the neck.

They will not willingly walk into a situation they see no way out of. Gently teach to walk towards a closed gate or into a trailer. Always encourage them to walk forward from behind.

Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure these guidelines are correct and comply with the current knowledge and understanding of Alpacas, neither the British Alpaca Society nor any of its members accept any responsibility for anything that might arise from the use of this guide.