



AAI Newsletter

 *Autumn 2021*

Welcome to the AAI Newsletter Autumn 2021 issue. Thanks so much to all who contributed. As the evenings are beginning to close in, this photo will hopefully bring you back to the long summer days and seemingly endless cria watch!



In this issue, our Farm Focus is on Mountain View Alpacas based in Ballina, Co. Mayo. It's always very interesting to read how our farms started up, what they have learned along the way, and the future direction they decide to take. Niall Clayton tells all in this issue.

In the veterinary corner we have a detailed and informative article on the importance of colostrum in newborn crias from Dr. Paul Wood, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Edinburgh. It should serve to focus our minds over the Winter months on preparing for next year's cria season.

Back in July, International BAS judge Roger Clarke spent a very busy couple of days at Moonhall Alpacas judging the SSE Alpaca Group Inaugural Fleece Show. Susan Murphy gives an entertaining account of the Show, which was a huge success, and we are indebted to Roger for all his hard work, and to Moonhall for their hospitality over the weekend. The SSE Alpaca Group have also just released dates for the 2022 All Ireland Fleece Show. Scroll down to see all the details!

As always, we would welcome contributions from across the spectrum of the alpaca community in Ireland. Our next Newsletter will be in January 2021 and we would be delighted to hear from you, so get typing! Feel free to email your articles to info@alpaca.ie or directly to me (Paula Lunn) at ashfordalpacas@gmail.com.

All the best, Paula

Farm Focus: Mountain View Alpacas - Our Story

by Niall Clayton

So let's start at the beginning! Mountain View alpacas all began back in 2017 when I first came across the beautiful animals on the television. I was so mesmerised by them that I started researching them on the internet and was completely amazed by everything about them! After hours of researching and falling in love with the animal, I couldn't wait any longer after reading so much about them (I think you know what's coming next), I went out and bought some alpacas. And so the alpaca addiction began....

I started off with two females, one of which was pregnant and after two weeks she gave birth. About 6 months later my alpaca addiction was well underway, my first cria was a boy, which meant he needed a friend, and so off I went and made my herd up to four. Then it was time to add some colour to the girl's field, now I'm at 5! Almost five years later I have been growing my herd organically and I am now the proud owner of 11 beautiful alpacas of a variety of different colours.

Being young and eager, I wanted to do everything with the alpacas from trekking and farm visits to breeding them and processing all of their fleece myself the old fashioned way with a traditional spinning wheel. Having tried a lot of different things with them, my main focus is on breeding them. I believe in quality over quantity which is why I have decided to remain focused on improving my herd year on year. After entering the first fleece show in almost two years in Ireland, it brought me so much joy when I found out all three of my entries had placed! It makes me feel that my breeding programme is on the right track!



In my opinion, having a smaller herd gives you so much more satisfaction of watching the little babies grow and develop their personalities. Over the years I have gotten to know every one of my alpaca's individual characteristics, which also

gives the added benefit of knowing if one of them may be sick.



Having recently invested in two very fine boys (black and grey) and introduced them to my herd, I am very keen to get them included into my breeding programme. I have always had a bit of a weak spot when it comes to greys and I am delighted to finally have one in my herd. Although greys can be a difficult colour to breed I am excited to see what he will produce!

After these couple of long hard years that everybody has been through, I think it's safe to say that it's not just myself that is eagerly awaiting to get back into the show ring and meet up with like-minded people once more!

Niall Clayton

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Husbandry tasks for the Autumn months

Task	Oct	Nov	Dec
Feed hay ad lib, along with a daily portion of alpaca nuts. Keep water troughs filled and clean.			
Body score, look for evidence of mites and treat if necessary, check for jaw abscesses, trim topknots and toenails.			
For nursing dams and thin alpacas, supplement daily hard feed with Speedi-Beet (beet pulp <u>without</u> added molasses).			
Administer vitamins AD ³ E (oral paste or injection) every 6 weeks beginning Sept and ending March. Take care to get the dosage correct.			
Continue to check FAMACHA (eye membranes) for signs of anaemia, and get poo samples checked regularly for evidence of worms (Faecal Egg Counts).			
Weigh feeding dams and cria regularly to monitor weight gain, record details.			
Stop all matings so as to avoid late in the year 2022 births.			
Test for pregnancy via spit offs. Ultrasound can also be used to detect pregnancy from about 40 days post-mating.			
Ensure adequate supply of good quality hay and buy in if necessary.			
Plan paddock/field rotation for over the winter months, and try to keep the driest fields for the wettest months.			
Check and repair field shelters to ensure alpacas have good protection from the elements.			
Have some alpaca coats in stock, in both adult and weanling sizes, for poorly or shivering animals.			

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The importance of colostrum and what to do if there is a problem

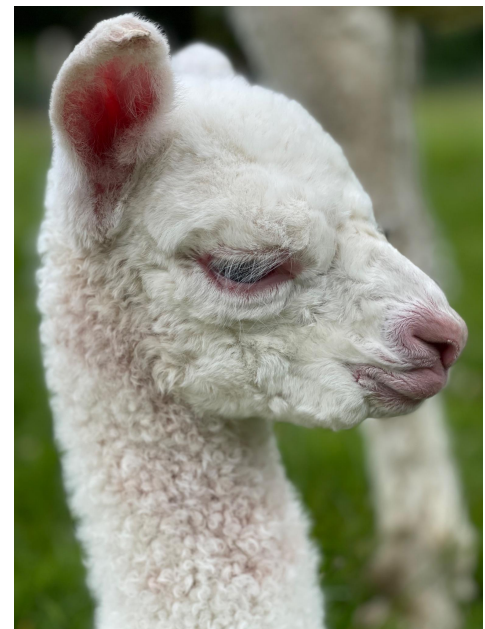
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All mammals rely on colostrum as an essential supply of key nutrients to their offspring. This first milk is rich in antibodies (especially IgG), energy and other essential vitamins and minerals that provide the best start to life for any newborn. You may be aware of the various farming campaigns that happen every year to shout about the value of good colostrum management. A key one in the livestock production sector in the UK has been #colostrumisgold which has demonstrated the benefits of colostrum in survival rates but also reduction in antibiotic use across cattle, sheep and pig farming. Although this message is not directed toward the alpaca industry the key points about the importance of colostrum are universal.

Whether you subscribe to the 'criating' or 'unpacking' terminology for birthing in alpacas you will all know that this time of the year can be incredibly rewarding, but also tiring and sometimes stressful. As with most things, good preparation is key to minimising stressful events and considering every eventuality (even if never needed) can help to make every birthing season a successful one.

Cria are born with no antibodies of their own to fight off disease, and are therefore at significant risk of infection. Without colostrum to supply protective antibodies the newborn cria is unlikely to survive any infectious challenge. In livestock production we talk about the 3 Q's of colostrum feeding; Quantity, Quality, Quickly and these should be at the forefront of our mind when observing our crias too.

A cria needs to receive 10-20% of its body weight (ie. A 7Kg cria needs 700 - 1400ml) in the first 24 hours of life. By 8 hours of age the efficiency of colostrum absorption will have started to decrease so the sooner colostrum feeding occurs, the better. With most normal birthings this is easily achievable



without any assistance as crias typically stand within 30-60 minutes and start feeding within 2-4 hours. Crias will then tend to feed every 2-4 hours; you may observe the cria swallowing and wagging it's tail as it feeds and will often see milk visible around the mouth when it stops. If a cria is not feeding properly you may notice them returning to their mother more often, no visible swallowing, no milk around the mouth and lots of vocalising. A cria that is not feeding adequately will not gain weight and so daily weighing of crias is a good tool in our armoury. We are looking for a cria to gain 100 – 500g per day. If you are going to weigh crias daily then try to do this just before they feed (or you feed them) so that we don't weigh their full stomach too!

If you do think that a cria is having difficulty feeding then we need to identify what the problem is. This means checking both the cria and the mother for the following;

1. Check that the mother has milk; this is the simplest check, and if the udder does not seem full then there are other alternatives available which can be factored in to our preparation for birthing
2. Check the cria; as well as a general check of the cria after birth we should also consider traumatic injuries from the birthing process (particularly if assistance was required) and congenital abnormalities such as a cleft palate. If you are concerned about any abnormal findings you should contact your vet immediately.

If a cria has not been able to feed from its mother then you may need to assist with feeding to ensure an adequate intake of colostrum. This can be done via a bottle and teat, however crias that have had a tough birth may have a poor suck reflex and be unable to get adequate food through a teat – this is where oesophageal feeding (not stomach tubing) can be used. This is not an easy technique and you should ask your vet to demonstrate the process until you become confident. It is easy for the tube to pass into the trachea (windpipe) rather than the oesophagus and lead to milk entering the lungs. Crias are prone to oesophagitis (inflammation of the oesophagus) if they are tube fed several times and so switching to bottle feeding is advised as soon as possible.

Although quality colostrum from your own farm is best to provide your crias with suitable protection this may not always be possible. As part of your preparation for birthing, establishing a store of frozen colostrum is essential. If you cannot store enough colostrum from your animals then speak to another local breeder about whether they can spare any (if you go down this route then make sure the alpaca's supplying the colostrum are of high herd health status, and fully vaccinated). If camelid colostrum is not available then the next best colostrum source is from goats, and then cattle – but it is essential that you source from high health farms, particularly avoiding those that are not TB, BVD and Johnes disease free. Colostrum

can be stored frozen in small (max 120ml) amounts and should be defrosted by placing in warm water (at around body temperature) – do not be tempted to place in boiling water or in the microwave as extreme heat will destroy the antibodies that we need! Powdered colostrum is available commercially, mainly derived from cattle, however the quality of these is hugely variable and most should be considered colostrum supplements rather than a suitable colostrum replacer. Scientific and on farm trials suggest that the one commercial product that has the highest level of Immunoglobulins is Immucol Platinum and so if no other source of fresh/frozen colostrum is available we would recommend this product as the only reasonable alternative.

If you are unsure whether a cria has taken enough colostrum in that first 24 hours or is not doing as well as you would like then it is possible to check their IgG (key immunoglobulin in colostrum) level. To ensure adequate transfer of antibodies the result of these tests should be at least 8000mg/L but ideally > 10000mg/L. A simple serum total protein test can give a rough idea of antibody absorption. A result of >55g/L is roughly equivalent to an Immunoglobulin level of 10000mg/L. A more accurate level can be provided by a specific camelid IgG test which can be run at most laboratories but will have a delay in results getting to you.

***Blood being collected at R(D)SVS
by Andy Hopker and Emily
Gorman***



If failure of passive transfer (FPT) has occurred after the cria is 24 hours old then the only method to correct this is by plasma transfusion. Plasma is a component of blood that is rich in proteins including antibodies. Again preparation is key and plasma can be sourced and stored prior to the breeding season. As well as FPT crias other newborn crias may benefit from plasma transfusions including; low birth weight (<6Kg), premature, difficult births or congenital defects.



Ideally blood will be taken from animals on your own farm (ideally fully vaccinated, adult males >60Kg). Each donor will be able to donate enough blood for one plasma transfusion. The donated blood will then be taken away to be spun in a centrifuge to separate the plasma. The plasma is often returned in bags of 300ml which is normally more than enough to give an FPT cria to correct the problem (typically 15-25mls/Kg is given). The plasma will need to be administered by your vet directly into the cria's veins via a blood filtration line.

Donor alpaca with an IV catheter in place

The plasma can be given fresh but most breeders will keep a stock of frozen plasma just in case they need it. Plasma can be stored frozen for two years from collection, as long as it has stayed frozen for the duration. As with colostrum, plasma should be defrosted slowly in a water bath set to body temperature before administration (so place it in the water bath while you wait for your vet to arrive).



There are not many places in the UK that can offer the specialist service of spinning alpaca blood to produce plasma, however the Pet Blood Bank service now offer this UK-wide. They will send out all the equipment that your vet will need to take the blood and then will organise courier services to transport the blood to them, and then the plasma back to your farm. More information can be found at petbloodbankuk.org.

Alpacas from the same farm sharing the isolation facilities at R(D)SVS.

Note from Editor: In Ireland, your vet can draw the blood from the alpaca donor into the appropriate blood bag and, with prior arrangement, you can then bring this to the Irish Equine Centre in Co. Kildare, where it will be spun to separate the plasma from the red blood cells. Keep the plasma in a chill bag until you get it home and put it straight into the freezer.



Announcing...!

**Sunny South East Alpaca Group 2022
All-Ireland Fleece Show
Saturday 17th / Sunday 18th September 2022
Judged by Barbara Hetherington, Beck Brow Alpacas, UK**

Following a very successful Inaugural Fleece Show back in July, the SSE Alpaca Group have hit the ground running and are thrilled to share with you the date for our 2022 show. As before, this Show is open to all alpacas, registered or not, on the island of Ireland.

We are privileged to have Barbara Hetherington, a highly experienced and accomplished International Alpaca Judge, kindly agree to judge the fleeces.

The Fleece Show will comprise Huacaya and Suri fleeces in Junior (6-12 months), Intermediate (12-24 months), Adult (24 to 48 months) and Senior (over 48 months) age classes.

We will shortly begin taking pre-bookings for the Show, with a maximum of 6 fleeces per farm. So you'll have lots of time to study those newly growing fleeces over the Winter and Spring months!

Keep an eye open for further announcements on all the usual Facebook and Instagram sites, or feel free to email the Group directly at:

ssealpacagroup@gmail.com

Sunny South-East Alpaca Group All Ireland Fleece Show

by **Susan Murphy, Moonhall Alpacas**

Airy, fluffy, bright, lustrous fleeces abounded at Moonhall Farm on the cusp of an August morning. The dawn of a new day brought camelid devotees together in an atmosphere that only they would find tantalising.

105 fleeces were entered in what was our inaugural SSEAG All Ireland Fleece Show.

The keen interest was very encouraging, if not unaffected by the fact that our judge was the internationally renowned judge Roger Clarke. We were lucky to have a media savvy team from Hilltop Alpacas keeping our event front and centre of all things alpaca on Facebook and Instagram so the event was extremely well advertised.

The event took place over two days with the majority of the competition taking place on the first day. An initial briefing on day one was helpful in ensuring everyone knew their job. The day progressed seamlessly after that with only a fifteen minute break mid-morning to quench our thirst.



After a short lunch, the committee and assistants were into a flow of unpacking fleeces, laying them out, scribing notes and tallying scores, extra comments, repacking, data input and compilation of all the results.

The suri's were judged on the second day. We were very pleased with the interest in this section of the show as suri numbers are relatively modest in Ireland as yet. In the end, Roger's inspections and deductions culminated in a list of winning fleeces.



The Supreme Champion Huacaya was awarded to **Ashford Daz (Ashford Alpacas)**, the Reserve Champion Huacaya was **Apple Vale Fortune (Tinryland Alpacas)**, and Judges Choice Huacaya was also **Apple Vale Fortune (Tinryland Alpacas)**.

Supreme Champion Suri was **Popham Suri Jacquetta (Ashford Alpacas)**, the Reserve Champion Suri was **Ashford Suri Daisy (Ashford Alpacas)**, and Judges Choice Suri was also **Ashford Suri Daisy (Ashford Alpacas)**.

Finally, Champion Pet/Unregistered was **Artwork Crackerjack (CD Alpacas)**.

Other winners were:

Champion Grey; **Curraghduff Farm with Prince of the Glann**

Champion Black; **Edenderry Alpacas with Miss Saigon**

Champion Brown; **Moonhall Alpacas with Moonhall Bosco**

Champion Fawn; **K2 Alpacas with K2 Hidden Classic**

Champion Light; **Briar Ridge Alpacas with Briar Ridge Esmerelda**

Suri Champion Colour; **Kazimo Alpacas with Ace Titania**

Sharon Moore from Hummingbird Alpacas had the arduous task of producing all the paperwork for the event and compiling all the data afterwards to produce a results sheet. We are indebted to her for being both our Alpaca Mother and our coordinator!

Roger Clarke, our esteemed judge, seemed very pleased with our efforts. He wrote on Facebook recently; “The entire event was a credit to all of your hard work and planning.”

SSE Alpaca Group Fleece Show Committee Members Sharon Moore, Adrian Murphy, Paula Lunn and Catriona McIntyre



The most rewarding aspect of the weekend was the knowledge we gleaned on fleece appraisal in all its forms. From fineness and handle, to staple length, density to impurity levels, guard hair to lustre/brightness, character and style, the integral essence of fleece assessment became that bit clearer after the weekend.

We are now looking forward to the All Ireland Fleece Show 2022, when we hope to streamline the show and put into practice what we have learned from this year's event. It's an exciting time for the SSE Alpaca Group!



WEBSITE: <https://alpaca.ie>

