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# AAI Newsletter

## Spring 2022

Welcome to the AAI Newsletter Spring 2022. As always, thanks so much to all who contributed. This issue's cover photo is brought to you by Hilltop Alpacas, Tullamore, Co. Westmeath.



In this issue, our Farm Focus is on Gáinne Mór Alpacas, Downings, Co. Donegal. Rita Wilson tells us how setting up an alpaca business with her husband Trevor on the family's farm in County Donegal, Ireland has changed their lives.

We are delighted to let you know all about the return of the AAI National Halter Show and Craft Show, after 2 years of cancellations due to Covid. This is a great opportunity to show off your alpacas and, more importantly, get them appraised by a leading International Judge. Read all about it below.

We also have updates from a couple of our regional groups, the Sunny South East Alpaca Group and Alpacas of Connacht. It would be great to hear from other regional groups around the country, so feel free to drop me a line.

Our next Newsletter will be in July 2022, so get typing! You can email your articles to [info@alpaca.ie](mailto:info@alpaca.ie) or directly to me (Paula Lunn) at [ashfordalpacas@gmail.com](mailto:ashfordalpacas@gmail.com).

*All the best, Paula*

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## **It's Showtime!**

As you'll be aware by now, this May 1st marks the return of our National Show for the first time in three years.

We are very much looking forward to showcasing not only our Alpacas, but the extent and support of our membership, Alpaca craft show and promoting the breed in general to the people in attendance. The show offers you, AAI members, the opportunity to have a great social occasion, and have your Alpacas assessed by a qualified, international judge, Robin Naseman.

It's a great occasion and a chance to meet some like-minded individuals, catch up with old friends and make some new ones. We really want to rally your support this year as members of the Association, to showcase the industry as a whole, help with dealing with the public on the day and, by bringing your Alpacas, creating a wonderful spectacle for us all to be proud of.

We hope this National Show will be very much a Team Effort and, in the surroundings of our new stand-alone venue, should generate a lot of interest in Alpacas nationwide. Every effort is being made to ensure the safety of the Alpacas in terms of biosecurity, so don't have any concerns in that regard.

There will be food and refreshments available for all on the day. The craft show will be a great opportunity to show off all the wonderful work being done with our fleeces nationwide and there will be spinning, skirting and husbandry demonstrations throughout the day.

So, with all that in mind, please do make the effort to attend and support your Association. Looking forward to seeing you all again.

**Paul MacDonnell, Chairman, AAI**

A promotional poster for the Alpaca National Show 2022. The background is dark blue with a large, semi-circular white area containing a photograph of the show grounds. The Alpaca Association of Ireland logo is in the top left. Three circular inset images show alpaca judging, a craft fair, and a junior handling competition. Text on the poster includes the show dates (May Bank holiday, Sunday May 1st), location (Mullingar showgrounds), and contact information (Eircode N91 HxHo, 087 9843047). A red location pin icon says 'WE HAVE MOVED'. The show is open to the public from 10:00 to 17:00.

Alpaca Association of Ireland

Open to the public  
10:00 - 17:00

Children welcome to take part in our  
Junior Handling Competition

**Alpaca National Show 2022**  
May Bank holiday  
Sunday May 1st

Mullingar  
showgrounds  
**Eircode N91 HxHo**  
087 9843047

WE HAVE  
MOVED

# Alpaca Craft Show 2022

## In aid of the Irish Red Cross Ukraine appeal

### ENTRY FORM – All Ireland Alpaca Craft Show 2022

Please complete form for each entry.

**Name**

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**Address** .....

**Email** .....

**Contact No.** .....

**Class of entry**.....

Give the following details for each entry:

Yarn / Fleece Materials used.....

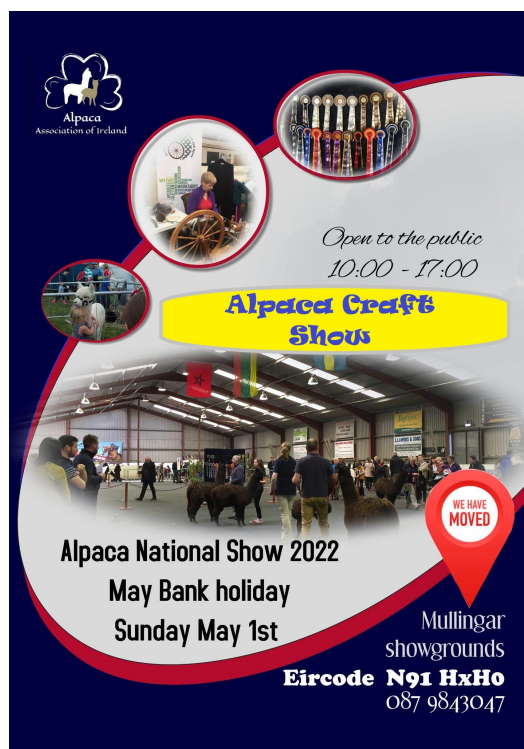
Is Fleece/ Yarn Irish - Y/N      Name / Farm .....

How is Yarn processed by hand or commercial mill. ....

Name of processor / mill .....

What crafting skills have you used in the creation of this piece?

Entry Fee: €10 first entry. 2nd and subsequent entries €5 each



## Rules & Conditions

1. All items must be the sole work of the exhibitor.
2. Each exhibit must consist of a garment or craft made using A minimum of 50% Alpaca Fibre in the form of raw fibre, yarn/ yarn blend/ or filling
3. All the above must be original works which have not been entered into any previous competition.
4. Using yarn from UK or Peru is acceptable, however additional points may be awarded where the fibre is from an Irish Alpaca and both the animal and Farm are named and where the fibre is hand processed / spun.
5. Separate classes will be held for large and small garments and for display and ornamental crafts, however these can be amalgamated if minimum numbers are not reached.
6. Photos and props may be used in order to enhance the display. These items will not be included as part of the judgment of the entry.
7. Judges decision will be final at all stages of the competition.
8. Exhibits are displayed at owners risk
9. Exhibits must be in place for judging by 10.30am on Sunday
10. Exhibits cannot be removed before 4.30pm.
11. Closing date for entries: online 22 April 2022. Late entries will be taken on the day subject to space availability; €15 per entry

Entry payment can be made to the Alpaca Association of Ireland or to Trish Kerr,  
[irishalpacayarns@gmail.com](mailto:irishalpacayarns@gmail.com) contact mobile: 0872131320

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# Farm Focus: Gáinne Mór Alpacas

by Rita Wilson

## Changing Our Lives

**Rita Wilson, Gainne Mor Alpacas, tells us how setting up an alpaca business with her husband Trevor on the family's farm in County Donegal, Ireland has changed their lives.**

### How and why did you start keeping alpacas?

For many years my husband's father John, and his brother Robert, were farmers in the seaside village of Downings, in County Donegal. In 2017 Trevor suffered the loss of his father and in 2018 Robert sadly passed away from motor neurone disease. It was a very hard few years for the family and knowing Trevor wanted to spend more time outdoors I started to look at what we both could do alongside the family's sheep farm.

I became intrigued by the endearing look of alpacas, their versatility and the fact that by nature they are more environmentally friendly than other livestock. Alpacas are very suitable for a smallholding and with their docile and calming nature I knew they would fit perfectly into our lives.



Trevor's older brother Gary, who took over the farm let us use some buildings and land and in March 2019 our first females arrived - soon after Trevor started to fall in love with alpaca farming. We then had to make a decision; did we grow our herd into business or stay with alpaca keeping as a hobby?

To make Gainne Mor Alpacas work as a business we both needed to commit wholeheartedly and embrace everything alpaca. I have run my own landscape photography gallery in Downings for more than seven years and I knew if we were going to go down the business route a business plan was essential to move forward. For Trevor to live solely on alpaca

generated earnings meant we had to explore all possible revenue streams from fibre production, alpaca experiences and breeding.

Knowing alpaca fleece is one the world's most sustainable fibres I contacted William from McNutt of Donegal, based in Downings, about the possibility of making woven scarves from our fibre. Realising how much fibre we needed, and how many scarves we could get from one cone of yarn, we knew it was going to be a slow process but from the start William wanted to support our venture. McNutt of Donegal has produced some of the world's finest weaves for more than 60 years and to have someone onboard with so much knowledge and experience was a real asset.

The next step was to learn all we could about alpaca fibre and I contacted Amberly Alpacas in Clogher. Roger Clarke invited us to visit and answered our questions, and by getting our hands on the fleeces of every alpaca we looked at we could fully appreciate the quality and how to assess them.

The love Roger and Elaine have for their alpacas is evident in how they handle and speak about them - they know each one's quirks and personality, and I will never forget the soft, buttery feel of a finished knitted product Elaine showed us. This really gave us something to aim for.

With a few more alpaca purchases we were on our way to producing our first batch of weaving yarn in 2019. This arrived from East Anglia Alpaca Mill in early autumn with just enough time to have the scarves woven before the Christmas rush. They were very popular with locals and tourists alike and sold quickly over the summer of 2020.

As well as the woven scarves we sell 100 gram yarn balls and rugs hand made by Pocket House Studio. They're a big hit with guests to the farm and we even have some custom orders in for 2022.



## **Has using your fleece been difficult and is there anything you wished you'd known before you started?**

One of our biggest challenges was scale - we didn't have enough animals to produce enough consistent quality fibre for commercial yarn production. We had a few fawn fleeces, a few ebony, and a few other colours but we needed to send a lot more to the mill in 2020.

William suggested collaborating with other owners to send as much fleece as we could for batch processing. This would enable us to produce more scarves than the previous year and increase our colour range. Setting up the warp takes time at the factory so we had to be conscious of the time involved to make it worthwhile for McNutts. As we have built up a good relationship with Roger and Elaine they were more than happy to work with us alongside McNutt of Donegal to produce our scarf range.

## **What have you found to be the best way to sell your products?**

Tourism is the best way to sell our products. We started selling online in November 2021 but our scarves and yarn are a 'touchy feely' product and selling online doesn't allow customers to feel the softness. The tourism sector is an opportunity to expand our reach and revenue and market our products directly to the public.



Our alpaca experiences create a connection with customers and they can understand why alpacas are sustainable and environmentally friendly. When customers are able to see the product as well as the animal they make a connection and are more inclined to purchase the item. Customers also love the traceability from alpaca to end product and this is a huge focus for us.

I started to sell the scarves, alpaca plush toys, wooden sculptures, mugs and cushions in my photography gallery in summer 2020. This is where I did my market research for the experiences and business branding and I was in a very lucky position as thousands of tourists come to Downings every year.

## **Why did you decide to offer walks and how have people responded?**

When our first alpacas arrived we were inundated with messages from locals wanting to visit. We soon realised the potential they offered for agri-tourism and we made the decision to offer meet and greet experiences and alpaca walks in summer 2021.

The website was launched with an online booking system in June 2021 and alpaca walks for those over eight years old available once a day on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Animal welfare is paramount for us and no alpaca is walked more than once a day.

We also offer meet and greets for children under eight as private one family groups. Each child has their own alpaca colouring pack as a keepsake from their visit. The children love to sit at the benches colouring while looking at the alpacas. There's something captivating and magical about watching the alpacas with children and once the child stands quietly the alpacas soon want to investigate. The child's face says it all and the joy on some adults' faces is also lovely to see.

People find the alpacas captivating, therapeutic, and a good remedy to reduce stress as the pace is slow. Overall, we have been overwhelmed with the support and enthusiasm for our business in Downings from locals and visitors alike.





### **Can you tell us about your aims as a breeder?**

We want to produce quality fibre animals. Since Amberly Alpacas produces outstanding alpacas purchasing top quality animals was a priority for our business plan and these first steps will influence the yarn we produce years down the line. White alpacas are our base herd because their fibre is ideal for blending to make other colours particularly grey. We also made the decision not to have stud males; our main aim is to improve our fibre each year and to achieve this outside matings are the best option for us.

We also purchased our first Suri female, Lignum Million Dollar Baby in 2021 with thanks to Amberly Alpacas. The lustre of her fleece even on the dullest of days is amazing and I cannot wait to see the yarn she produces. I also have keen interest in Leopard Appaloosas and would love to add one to our herd down the line.

### **What are the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of keeping alpacas?**

The births - the joy from watching a cria safely on the ground and the tender bonding process between mum and cria is amazing to witness. These moments are so endearing and the animals are a joy to be around. They have been a lifestyle change for us but they have improved it emotionally and mentally and given Trevor a new purpose in life - a goal to be the best alpaca farmer he can.



## Husbandry tasks for the Spring months

Task	April	May	June
Feed hay ad lib, feed pregnant and nursing dams extra protein			
Body score, check for jaw abscesses, check teeth and toenails, look for evidence of mites and treat if necessary			
Continue halter training weanlings			
Give a mineral drench, especially to pregnant females and weanlings			
Drench for liver fluke if appropriate to your land			
Get poo samples checked regularly for evidence of worms (Faecal Egg Counts); this is of particular importance in the Spring months			
Weigh pregnant females and weanlings regularly to monitor weight gain, record details			
Insert microchip in weanlings and register with AAI			
Order fly deterrent			
Harrow fields/paddocks, fertilize and reseed if necessary			
Plan matings for this year, especially if you want to avoid winter births			
Give annual booster vaccination against clostridial diseases to entire herd; and particularly to pregnant females as it will boost their antibody levels, which will then be passed to the cria via colostrum			
Check heavily pregnant females regularly for signs of labour from 10 months gestation onwards			
Prepare birthing kit in readiness for upcoming births: old towels, cria coat, latex gloves, antiseptic spray for navel, disinfectant, lubricant, long arm gloves, umbilical clamps in case of bleeding from cord, weigh scales, colostrum, bottle and teat, thermometer			
Weigh newborn cria every other day for first 2 weeks of life, and weekly thereafter, to ensure they are gaining weight adequately			

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## *Alpacas of Connacht Regional Group News*

### *Ruth Newton, Curraghduff Alpacas*

Alpacas of Connacht formed in December 2021. The focus of the group is to have a support hub for breeders and owners of alpacas within the Connacht area. Having localised hubs enables owners and people thinking about owning alpacas to access direct mentoring, education, information and support from people who know the area. The group actively promote the Alpaca Association of Ireland (AAI) and are keen to be recognised as a regional hub within the AAI.

Since forming, the group have been busy. The popular Cuppa and Alpaca Chat meeting was held in December at Curraghduff Farm. This was a perfect opportunity to meet other alpaca enthusiasts in the area and make helpful links with others who live close by.

Some of the group visited Moonhall Alpacas in Kilkenny to meet some members of the Sunny South East Group in January. This was extremely helpful in developing the beginnings of our group, it provided us with some ideas, inspiration and developed further links.



#### ***Some of the group attending the SSE Meet Up in Kilkenny***

In February the group organised two BAS Affiliated Training Days that were run by Roger and Elaine Clarke from Amberly Alpacas. It was perfect for beginners and considered to be a fantastic refresher day for others. This was open to everyone, not just to those within the Connacht area. It was really popular, with both sessions being fully booked. We

were delighted to have people from across the West of Ireland attend, and a few people who were just thinking about owning alpacas. Such a perfect way to start an alpaca journey.



***Let's talk about alpacas – One of the Training Days hosted by Alpacas of Connacht***

***Getting hands on – Practical session in alpaca husbandry – One of the Training Days hosted by Alpacas of Connacht***



Stuart from the group also attended a Parasitology Course in the UK in February. He is practising taking samples from his own herd and plans to offer this service to others within the group.

In March, the group have continued to support each other and share ideas for the future in the WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group is a perfect support hub for members where questions and concerns are picked up from everyone within the group. Having local knowledge of suppliers, vets, breeders and general information is a true reflection of how helpful regional groups can be. The Alpacas of Connacht Facebook Group is open to everyone and it's a lovely way to share all things alpacas. We love seeing regular updates and pictures posted on the page.

In April, the group will be hosting another course: A Breeders Guide to Birthing and Cria Care ran by Roger and Elaine Clarke from Amberly Alpacas. Again, this looks to be another popular day that is open to everyone.

Individually we are looking forward to attending the AAI Alpaca Show in Mullingar in May and as a group we are thrilled to be able to support the AAI and have a table to promote Alpacas of Connacht too. In response, the group have collaboratively designed a logo to help promote and be recognised as a group across the alpaca community. Members of the group will be happy to answer any questions about upcoming events and will be keen to take details of anyone requiring further information about the group.

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## Sunny South East Alpaca Group Regional News

*Paula Lunn, Ashford Alpacas*

The Sunny South-East Alpaca Group (SSEAG) is a co-operative movement run from Co Kilkenny for people who are existing alpaca farmers or who are just getting into this lifestyle. Each member is included in a WhatsApp group and they can ask questions off the group pertaining to their alpacas or associated workings.

On **Saturday 23rd April**, Moonhall Alpacas in Kilkenny will be hosting a **plasma blood drive** in preparation for cria season ahead. A little background for any new breeders out there: failure of passive transfer (FPT) occurs when the newborn cria does not get enough of the essential colostrum from its dam, resulting in a hugely weakened immune system and death due to infection. Once the 24h window for ingestion of colostrum has passed, the only other way to boost the immune system is by plasma transfer, whereby the blood of a donor alpaca is spun down in a centrifuge and the plasma is siphoned off. This is then administered intravenously to the cria. It is of huge benefit for breeders to have a stock of plasma in the freezer ready for use if FPT occurs. Because of the risk of disease transmission, the plasma should be from a member of your own herd. This blood drive day is now **fully subscribed**. However, feel free to contact Adrian Murphy at Moonhall if you'd like any advice on doing this yourself or as part of another regional group.

Heptavac-P vaccinations will continue to be available to SSEAG members on a monthly basis throughout the Spring and Summer months. Strict collection times and cold storage required. As this is a live vaccine, it is important that injections are administered on the day of collection.

Alpaca Poo testing is being carried out by Jenny McIntyre from Hilltop Farm Alpacas. Members can send their samples to Jenny, and she can have results for them within twenty-four hours.

The SSEAG will be represented at the upcoming AAI National Show at the Mullingar Showgrounds on Sunday 1st May, so swing by our table and say hello!



**WEBSITE: <https://alpaca.ie>**