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AAI Newsletter

Winter 2021/22



Welcome to the AAI Newsletter Winter 2021/22. As always, thanks so much to all who contributed. While we may be in the midst of winter, there are the odd Spring-like days already creeping in, which lighten the heart no end! Above is a snapshot of our alpacas taking full advantage of some bright winter sun this week.

In this issue, our Farm Focus is on Ashtonelle Alpacas, Bangor, Co. Down. Kathleen Mathers tells us of her alpaca journey, starting with 3 pet boys almost 10 years ago, and expanding into a breeding farm as her fascination and love for the animals grew. In the veterinary corner, we have an article from UCD Veterinary Hospital which gives very useful information on many of the common ailments we encounter as alpaca owners.

We also have updates from a couple of our regional groups, the Sunny South East Alpaca Group, and introducing our newest regional group: Alpacas of Connacht! We would be delighted to hear from other regional groups around the country, just drop me a line. Our next Newsletter will be in April 2022, 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: Ashtonelle Alpacas

by **Kathleen Mathers**

In the early evening of the 15th June 2015, a week or so earlier than expected, our first home-bred alpaca was born. Weighing in at 9.5 kg and up on his feet and feeding more quickly than the textbooks suggested, he was utterly adorable. Those long skinny legs! That elongated neck bending under mum's tum to suckle. Dark mesmerising eyes. It was definitely love. A few days later a second cria arrived and over the next few months watching the two cria play and grow we knew that alpacas would play an ever-increasing part in our lives. And we wouldn't have it any other way!



Atom and Agatha – our first homebred cria.

In the 1980's, as a teenager, I had owned and bred British Saanen, British Alpine and Angora goats. These were all registered using the prefix 'Ashtonelle' that my father had also used as the herd prefix for his pedigree Hereford cattle. It seemed natural and logical to continue to use this prefix so when we got our first pet alpaca boys in 2013 we registered the herd prefix with the British Alpaca Society. But deciding on what names to call and register our first cria wasn't easy. I wanted a naming 'system' of some sorts but my preferred one was to call offspring with a name beginning with the same letter as their mother's name to help remember parentage etc. The problem, however, was that our 4 *starter* girls all had names beginning with 's'. So, I opted to start with 'A' and name each year's cria with the next letter of the alphabet. Our first two cria were registered Ashtonelle Atom and Ashtonelle Agatha and in 2021 we registered 6 cria all with names beginning with 'G'. My husband is driven somewhat crazy when we twist the rules. For example, Ashtonelle Fiddlesticks is known as Stix on the farm, Ashtonelle Efficacious is known as Pinky (think 'Lily the Pink' by The Scaffold).

Before I go further I ought to provide some background to my personal circumstances. At the time alpacas first piqued my interest I was living and working in medical research in North London. I knew that it would be impossible to keep alpacas in the small patch of garden that was just about big enough to entertain my two cats. I think my long-suffering husband thought my enthusiasm might wane but he patiently drove me to nearby alpaca farms and helped me research all things alpaca, ownership and husbandry requirements.

In the late summer of 2013 we introduced three pet-boys – Freddie, Bob and Mondas – to my family home in Bangor, Co. Down. It seemed like an ideal solution – I got a chance to own these wonderful animals along with an excuse to visit home and my parents more frequently, the alpacas would help keep the grass down in the 10-acre small-holding and my mum and niece were prepared to do the day-to-day husbandry. Of course, little did we realise how captivated we would become and the whole family fell in love with the new arrivals. Within a year we got another 4 animals – all girls this time – and the journey really began with the arrival of Atom and Agatha as already described. As the herd grew and we were travelling from London every few weeks it was time to make a longer-term plan. Long story short, my husband and I have now relocated to Bangor and are currently, but not patiently, building a house on a 16 acre-farm in Greyabbey where we will ultimately move most of the animals and be able to expand the herd and better manage pasture.



*Our first boys
pictured on
their arrival to
our farm in
2013.*

*Front – Mondas
Middle – Bob
Rear – Freddie*

At the moment we have a herd that fluctuates around 30 alpacas at any one time. They are all beautiful, inquisitive, entertaining and relaxing – and we simply adore them. To date our breeding programme has largely had the goal of increasing the number of breeding females.

Of course, we want females with sound confirmation, proven genetics and consistent fleece qualities and statistics. As I write this we now have 16 girls – though this year 3 girls have been withdrawn from breeding due to patella luxation, skin problems and a second twinning pregnancy in the same female. In 2021, Ashtonelle Gonzo became our first 2nd generation Ashtonelle cria.

Whilst we have had a limited number of females to work with we have been able to use stud males from across the north of Ireland to help get additional quality and consistency of quality into the herd. All our homebred animals have had very fine fleece stats and we are already beginning to achieve a good consistency of micron across the fleece. We need now to work on longer staple lengths and increasing density. All this takes time! Watch this space!



Mum Mathers has always been a knitter. At dog shows (another story) and extended family get togethers she is famous for always having a pair of needles clacking away. It is so nice that the yarn she now uses is almost exclusively our own homegrown alpaca fibre. She was thrilled to bits to win the AAI's Virtual Craft Competition in 2020 with this cardigan – showing the range and beauty of some of the natural alpaca colours. Having said that – mum loves colours so we have also been experimenting with mill-dyed and our own efforts at hand-dyeing yarn. We've been keen to dye onto fawn fleece – as there does seem to be a limit to how many hats, scarves,



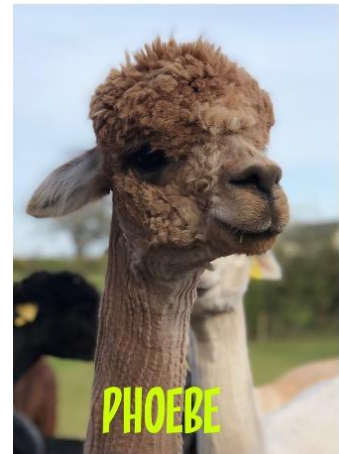
gloves and jumpers you can knit with brown that will be of interest to potential customers. Fawn fleece seems to take reds and purples really well – and as part of the craft competition prize Olann Mill processed a fleece from Dandy, a light fawn male – into this wonderful unique orange/ginger colour.



We have really enjoyed the annual Northern Ireland Alpaca Group halter shows and our homebred boys and girls have fared well every year. We are determined in 2022 and beyond to enter more fleece shows but this means we need to be better at planning our fleece use and to have a less chaotic shearing day. We do feel, however, that we have learnt a lot about fleece characteristics from processing individual fleeces into yarn and understanding the effect on yarn quality from different coloured animals and as the same animals grow older.

The first six years of alpaca breeding were a breeze – twenty plus cria (albeit averaging 60% boys) without a hitch. The 2021 birthing season was somewhat different.

After two premature births, including a full uterine prolapse, and a set of twins with one foetus aborted at 314 days and the other foetus requiring vet assistance to be cleansed later the same day we were devastated to lose our wonderful, beautiful, funny, charismatic Phoebe and her cria due to a uterine torsion in May. She is still missed every day. The joyful highs of alpaca ownership can occasionally be matched with some pretty awful lows.



We were delighted (if a little nervous) to take part in the first ever BAS sponsored National Alpaca Farm Day in September 2021. We restricted numbers due to Covid and parking considerations but still had more than 120 people through the door – and could easily have had three times that number. The general public are definitely eager to come and meet alpacas and we hope to repeat the event next year and offer occasional experiences and visit to schools and care homes.



With a fair wind and good luck, we hope that our house build and move to a new farm will be complete during 2022 – Brexit and a pandemic have made this an incredibly challenging time for us. We don't envisage ever becoming 'large-scale' as the unique individuality of alpacas is what provides us with the greatest satisfaction but we are looking forward to more cria every year and making sound breeding judgements to improve both fleece and confirmation traits.



Husbandry tasks for the Winter months

Task	Jan	Feb	Mar
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).			
Wean cria who are over 6 months of age and over 25kg in weight, and dose with anti-coccidial wormer (Baycox or equivalent) 7 days after weaning.			
Microchip weanlings and register with AAI.			
Begin halter training weanlings.			
Weigh pregnant females and weanlings regularly to monitor weight gain, record details.			
It is advised to castrate pet males (over 18 months old) during the winter months to avoid possibility of fly strike.			
Plan paddock/field rotation for the coming year.			
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.			



Alpaca Health Check

Victoria Rhodes¹, Fay Pooley², Marijke Beltman¹

1. UCD Veterinary Hospital, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland
2. Scarsdale Vets, Derby, United Kingdom

The alpaca originates from South America in the dry, high altitude Andean Planes and have therefore had to adapt to the Irish climate and its wet, lush pastures. There are two types of alpaca kept in Ireland, Huacaya are the most popular and known for their fluffier fleece, Suri alpacas have a longer, silky fleece that parts down the spine. Alpacas are pseudo-ruminant with 3 compartments/stomachs aiding digestion of plant matter. These compartments are referred to as C1, C2 and C3. C1 can be compared to the rumen in ruminants, with C2 most like the reticulum and C3 being partially like the abomasum with part of it containing gastric glands.

Worming

Alpacas do not maintain a long lived immunity to common parasites like other farm species and are therefore very susceptible to parasite burdens. Each farm will need a specific parasite control plan in place to help minimise disease and resistance, dependent on herd size, grazing platform size and disease status. Signs of ill thrift, weight loss, with/out diarrhoea can be common clinical signs of parasitic disease. Fly strike can be seen during the hotter months if dirty hindquarters are not dealt with correctly.

Faecal sampling is the main monitoring tool used in alpacas and samples must be collected from individual animals. Monitoring should be carried out at least twice yearly in healthy animals. Clean pasture is ideal for the most at risk animals including weanlings and cria, however not always available. Poo picking fields, like done in horses, is a good way to reduce parasitic burden, especially if grazing areas are limited.

Worming products typically used in alpacas include:

- Benzimidazoles (e.g. Panacur 10% oral suspension 2ml per 10kg orally and when confirmed or suspected Nematodirus/whipworm to be used for four consecutive days, can use a higher dose if Giardia is confirmed or suspected)
- Avermectins (e.g. Ivomec injection 0.6mg/kg sub cutaneously)
- Moxidectin (e.g. Cydectin 0.4mg/kg orally)
- Coccidiosis (e.g. Baycox bovis, 3ml per 10kg orally, Vecoxan 1ml per 2.5kg orally)
- Fluke treatment Triclabendazole (e.g. Fasinex 12mg/kg orally), Closantal (Flukiver 7.5mg/kg orally)

All bought-in animals should be isolated from the main herd for 21 days and have a worm egg count performed.

Vaccination

Vaccination should be carried out routinely to help protect against clostridial diseases. Most vaccines cover multiple strains of clostridial disease and include Lambivac (2ml), Heptavac (1ml), Bravoxin 10 (1ml) and Covexin 10 (1ml). There are no licenced vaccines for alpacas but the current recommended vaccine is Bravoxin 10/ Covexin 10 due to the type A cover.

A primary course should be completed with two doses given at 4 - 6 weeks apart and can be started from 2-3 months of age if the cria are from vaccinated mothers and received sufficient colostrum. A booster vaccine should be given annually. For pregnant females, giving a booster vaccine 4 - 6 weeks before unpacking will ensure there are maximum numbers of antibodies in the colostrum. If the vaccination status of the dam is unknown, the cria can be given Lambivac at 48 hours old and given again at 2-3 weeks, before being moved over to the Adult clostridial vaccine schedule with a primary course 4 - 6 weeks apart repeated annually. Animals that have not received a clostridial vaccine and have a suspicion of tetanus can be given tetanus antitoxin (3ml maximum for an adult).

Ulcers

Alpacas can suffer from 3rd compartment (C3) ulceration, similar to those seen in horses, and can become worse during stressful periods like illness. You will need to speak to your vet if your alpaca has a suspect ulcer as it will need to be examined and possibly a blood test performed to confirm the diagnosis. It is recommended to treat alpacas with IV Pantoprazole (1mg/kg IV q 24 hrs for 3 days or 2mg/kg SC q 24 hrs for 3 days) or Omeprazole (0.4 and 0.8 mg/kg IV q12 hours for 3 days). This helps increase the pH of the C3. Oral omeprazole is not recommended in any animal that is old enough to chew cud as it will not pass into C3.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is produced when ultraviolet light is absorbed by the skin and is needed for healthy bone growth and skin. Alpacas in their natural South American environment will be exposed to much higher levels of UV light compared to in Ireland. It is therefore important to supplement Vitamin D to prevent poorly calcified bones, similar to those seen in human Rickets disease. Vitamin D can be given orally (ADE paste, as directed) or by injection (Duphafral ADE, 1000IU/kg for prevention and 2000IU/kg for treatment). Younger, growing animals will require up to 3 doses (November, January, March) and all animals should be given one dose in November. Pregnant females should receive two doses in November and January. Some camelid-specific feeds such as Camelibra (GWF Nutrition) will also contain other vitamin and mineral supplements.

Cria Care

Cria, like calves and lambs, need to get sufficient colostrum within 24 hours of birth. IgG levels should be checked. If IgG levels are low (below 5.5g/dl) and the cria is weak, a plasma transfusion may be needed. It is recommended that larger farms have stored frozen plasma ready for the breeding season, which if stored correctly, can be kept for 5 years. Otherwise taking a unit of blood from a fully vaccinated male on the same farm, which then has to be spun down and the serum given to the cria slowly through an IV catheter. Ideally for breeders, the plasma should be collected and stored well in advance of any expected delivery dates as if needed this will likely be an emergency.

Sedation for castration and castration methods

Castration of males decreases testosterone production and can prevent unwanted behaviours in small groups. Gelded males are very popular as pets. Alpacas are typically castrated at approximately 18 months old, when they are fully grown. However the procedure can be performed later, depending on husbandry and behaviour.

Pre-operative preparation:

Alpacas should be fully vaccinated for tetanus and other clostridial diseases well in advance of any surgery. Food and water should be withheld 12 hours prior to the surgery to prevent regurgitation occurring. Alpacas need to be castrated by your vet, they usually complete the procedure under sedation. You will need to monitor the area after surgery for a week or so to ensure no infection develops. Complications can occur but thankfully are quite rare.

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Regional Group News

Alpacas of Connacht

Ruth Newton, Curraghduff Alpacas

Alpacas of Connacht are a new group that formed in December 2021. The idea of a localised group initially started when a few breeders within the region had noticed an increase in alpaca sales and enquiries, which in turn led to an increase in demand for alpaca training, support and guidance in Connacht. The idea of having people relatively close by to actively help with all things alpacas seemed to be a perfect way to ensure healthy and happy alpacas (and owners) whilst promoting the Alpaca Association of Ireland.

After a little research and a few discussions, it became evident that Alpacas of Connacht



could be of great support and benefit to not only new owners of alpacas but to those with varying degrees of experience. The group are really excited about the potential of future training courses, fleece shows, fibre preparation, feed distribution, active alpaca husbandry support and much more.

A month in and the group have already set up an active members WhatsApp group, a Facebook Group page that's open to anyone to help advertise the group and events, we have held a Cuppa and Alpaca Chat session which we plan to rotate the venue across members within the group, we have organised 2 Beginner/Refresher (BAS) Affiliated Training days to take place in February and a group visit to Moonhall Alpacas in Kilkenny to meet up with some of the Sunny South East members. We currently have 30 active and enthusiastic members with a combined total of 115 alpacas. We are aware of other alpaca owners within the region and welcome all to join us. Exciting times....

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Regional Group News

Sunny South East Alpaca Group *Alan McIntyre, Hilltop 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 the SSEAG WhatsApp group and they can ask questions of the group pertaining to their alpacas or associated workings.

As a matter of fact, in the recent distribution of Vitamin D injection, 251 doses were distributed or collected by members of the group which just goes to show the interest in alpacas and the importance of such a co-operative group. All members are informed through the WhatsApp group as to when to collect their doses.



Alpaca food and doses for cria are also available at excellent rates through the group and once again, each member can let the administrator know what they require, and it will be provided for them on a specified time.

Through this co-operative, Alpaca Poo testing is 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. As you might know, this wet weather is a breeding time for all of those worms and poo-picking is essential. But as we all know, its almost impossible to collect every single bit and eggs will hatch and travel up to a meter and lie in the grass waiting for the unsuspecting alpaca to chew them up.

Those who have samples with worms/parasites in them will also be advised on how to deal with their count.



On 12th and 13th February 2022, Roger and Elaine Clarke from Amberly Alpacas will be providing a course on alpaca husbandry in Moonhall Alpacas. Both dates have been fully booked and everybody is looking forward to learning from the best-known alpaca couple on the island of Ireland. Jenny will also be testing poo samples on the day for those who bring some.

They will then have their results on their way home.

SSEAG is also running its All-Ireland Fleece show on 17th and 18th September 2022. Following on from a hugely successful inaugural fleece show in 2021, there are already in excess of 90 entries already accounted for, so if you are interested in having your alpaca fleece examined by one of Britain's best judges, Barbara Hetherington, please keep an eye on SSEAG Facebook page and maybe you could be going home with some prizes and new information about your alpaca's fleece.

It will be a busy year for the SSEAG, but in order to move forward we need to learn from the best, and also from the experience of those around us.



WEBSITE: <https://alpaca.ie>

