

# The Journal of RMLA



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# Llama-Grams Lift Spirits, Provides COVID Relief

By Morgan Barba, Chair - RMLA Youth and 4-H Committees

As the pandemic continues and people are getting creative with how they celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and holidays, our hobby farm in Henderson, CO has had several opportunities to spread llama love and educate the public about camelid care.

My first llama-gram opportunity was this past summer for a birthday celebration. A woman was supposed to celebrate her 30th birthday in Brazil but had to cancel her trip because of COVID-19 restrictions. Her husband arranged for my family to bring two of our llamas to a backyard BBQ as a surprise for his wife. We spent more than an hour answering questions for the party attendees and posing for pictures. My mom posted a few of these pics on her Facebook page just for fun and we received three more calls for similar birthday surprises.



I think we take it for granted what a special opportunity interacting with llamas can be because we do it every day. But the smile on people's faces when they open the door and see a llama on their front porch is so much fun to see.

This past Christmas, we were able to give back to local charities by donating a llama-gram to my mom's work charity auction. We raised \$240 for the Foothills Animal Shelter, Judi's House, and Food Bank of the Rockies. The winning bidder bought the llama-gram for his wife's birthday this summer and thanked us for "a cool and thoughtful silent auction item." It certainly got a lot of attention during the virtual bidding process because a lot of people had never heard of a llama-gram before.

Looking ahead to the spring, we have been invited to visit Megan's Place in Wheatridge, CO. Megan's Place is a care facility for children ages 3 – 18 with developmental disabilities. I welcome all these opportunities to share my love of animals with others and to also expose my boys, Charlie and Mason, to a variety of different social situations. It's not the ideal situation – I'd much rather be showing and performing with my animals – but it is something that gets me and my family out and about and spreads a little joy to others. Stay strong and I hope to see you all in person later this year.



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## Journal Submission Dates, Ad Rates and Specifications

| Issue  | Submission Deadline | Mailing Date |
|--------|---------------------|--------------|
| Spring | February 20         | March 20     |
| Summer | May 20              | June 20      |
| Fall   | August 20           | September 20 |
| Winter | November 20         | December 26  |

| Ad Type         | Width x Height | Member | Non-Member |
|-----------------|----------------|--------|------------|
| Business Card   | 3.5" x 2"      | \$15   | \$18       |
| 1/4 Page Horiz. | 7.5" x 2"      | \$24   | \$36       |
| 1/4 Page Vert.  | 3.5" x 4.5"    | \$24   | \$36       |
| 1/3 Page Horiz. | 7.5" x 3"      | \$35   | \$48       |
| 1/3 Page Vert.  | 2.5" x 10"     | \$35   | \$48       |
| Half Page       | 7.5" x 5"      | \$48   | \$72       |
| Full Page       | 7.5" x 10"     | \$78   | \$117      |
| Two Page Spread | 15" x 10"      | \$200  | \$300      |

- **Classified Ads**—Member \$10 for up to 50 words  
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- Ad rates are quoted per issue. Lock in the current rate by purchasing the same ad for four consecutive issues and receive a 10% discount.
- **INSTRUCTIONS FOR ARTICLE AND AD SUBMISSION:** Email all text and/or graphics content to: RMLAEDITOR@GMAIL.COM. 'Camera ready' ads and articles should be submitted via email in .PDF, or any text readable by MS Word. Images alone should be submitted in .jpeg(.jpg) or .tiff. Quality photos start at 1-2MB.
- We suggest ads and article graphics be submitted in color at 300dpi. Both will be converted to grayscale for printing.
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## EDITORS' CORNER

### Editors' Corner

We have created another great issue for you. But first we want to thank all of you who submitted articles or gave permission for reprints: THANK YOU! Each issue is only possible with your continuing support.

Now we look forward to this year and the return to some sense of normalcy. It is going to be great fun getting out in public again with our fantastic animals. We look forward to receiving your reports on activities, fairs and shows. It has been a long time...too long. Cabin fever is way past 'getting old'. It is very OLD!

Please take time to look at this issue's Postscript on page 27. When I think about this quote, it is really about our organization, i.e., RMLA. We have a great Board of Directors who are leading us into the future with innovative and maybe transformative ideas. But they need the rest of us to implement and create this future.

"Leaders are incomplete on their own. They are the reflection of the support of their followers. Followers are the walls and roof to the foundation set up by the leaders." - Chandan Barik

The new website, being constructed as I write, is just one example. When you see it, you will want to say WOW! The changes made to the Fairplay Lama Event over the last two years is another example. We, the members, were heard and the Board made changes to address our concerns. Finding ways to keep the organization's operating costs down so that our dues have remained unchanged is a constant concern of our Board.

So, let's all find a way, no matter how small, to be the walls and roof of the foundation of RMLA. And to Ron, 'thank you' for finding this great quote on Leaders and Followers.

Ron and I look forward to continuing to produce a quarterly Journal we can all be proud of. If you have ideas or suggestions, we would like to hear from you. Keep those cards and letters and articles coming in.

Kathy and Ron



### Cover Photo:

Thank you to Cindy Ruckman who submitted this and many of the photos for Marty McGee Bennett's article on Teaching the Young, page 12.

# Letter from Your RMLA Board

*Hello SPRING!*

'Thank you' to all who have renewed their annual dues and those who have joined RMLA for the first time! We are appreciative of you and look forward to going into the future of RMLA with you. We give an extra big thanks to Membership Committee, Dan and Ellen Schreiner, who saw that members received the gentle reminder that dues and updated information are due.

We are hopeful that our lives will get back to somewhere like 'normal' and we can return to outside activities with friends and llamas. If you are planning an event, RMLA continues to have liability insurance for your event if the event is RMLA sponsored. Contact Mary Wickman to process an event application. Mary can be reached at mwickman1@gmail.com or 719-687-1423.

Speaking of liability insurance, here is a little story of time and energy well spent. Until recently, the organization has had its insurance with the same agency for years. Then, as hard as we tried, communications with the agent declined. Because RMLA insurance policies were not serviced in a consistent and timely fashion, the decision was made to move to a new agency. After a month or two of shopping, we located a new agency and were ready to make the move, only to discover the carriers would not release our paid policies to the new agent without undergoing a new underwriting procedure. Underwriting a new policy with animal-related activities does not come easy. These policies are rated as a high-risk for liability insurance. This risk translates to high premiums. With this in mind, we continued with the same agency and kept an Eagle Eye on its service.

After one year, we are now with the new agent and all appears to be moving smoothly. RMLA has the same premium costs with the same coverage. We now have an agent who returns calls, creates invoices, and can rapidly issue a Certificate of Liability for RMLA sponsored events. A lot of time and thought was spent making the correct move to a new agent and keeping up with the process so that RMLA and its members have the insurance when it is needed!

As previously mentioned, a new RMLA.com website is being built. You may recall that RMLA received an anonymous gift of \$10,000.00 to build the new website. A subscription to WPengine – a powerful and fast web hosting platform – was purchased and web designers were contracted. The generous gift will also pay for three years of IT support following the completion of the redesign. Focused on making the new RMLA website the most amazing website ever, Ron Hinds and Kathy Stanko have spent hundreds of hours working with Sedona Website Designs and its staff to develop what will become one of our industry's premier educational websites. There will be sections dedicated for members access only and other sections for members as well as the public. Our organization is deserving of such a website. We greatly appreciate the valuable gift of time spent on this project by Ron and Kathy. We are thankful that a donor stepped up to help RMLA.

And not to beat a dead horse, but.....

- The RMLA Library remains boxed up and in storage. Members do not have access to the material until a new volunteer to manage the Library steps up and takes over its management.
- Fairplay Llama Race and Walk is going to go away without volunteers who will give their time and others who will bring llamas and alpacas to share ONLY for the walk. This awesome event is a long-time RMLA tradition, and it is shameful to let it go away. It cannot be held without you and your animals. Mary Wickman has stepped up to run the Lama Lunacy this year. See the reprint on Page 22 for a look at the excitement of this event. Kids and parents alike love this event, even in the rain.

Hope you are doing well and staying healthy. Should you have any questions, please contact me. It is my pleasure to serve as your President.

Lougene lougenebaird@outlook.com 808-747-5023



## Fly Control for Llamas and Alpacas

Flies are a common cause of grief to anyone that farms as it is a constant struggle to keep flies at bay around your livestock. You are not alone.

There are currently no drugs, insecticides, or anthelmintics labeled for use in llamas and alpacas in the U.S. Therefore, all use of these products is considered extra-label and your veterinarian should be contacted on a case-by-case basis to recommend doses, administration, and drug residue withdrawal times. Also, it should be noted that drugs, including anthelmintics are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) while insecticides are regulated by the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA). For insecticides, labels will generally state that “It is a violation of Federal law to use this product in a manner inconsistent with its labeling”. So, it is very important to follow the directions carefully.

An excellent source of information on veterinary fly control products, as well as all other veterinary drugs, is the Compendium of Veterinary Products (CVP). An online version of the CVP is supported by Elanco and you can access this at <https://www.elancodvm.com/professional-resources>. Once you are in the CVP site, click on “Uses” the top banner and then select any livestock species and search “Fly”. Follow the search results to get a list of products available for fly control in livestock.

Pyrethroid-based and moxidectin-based topical products are the most common topical fly repellents used in farm animals. Depending on the product, these pour-ons can provide fly control for up to 1-2 weeks. They are relatively safe products that can be applied repeatedly per label directions for the prevention of flies, ticks, mosquitos and lice. Many formulations of these products are available over the counter and label instructions for application should be followed. CyLence, a synthetic pyrethroid, is another topical insecticide used for fly control in cattle. This product could be applied topically to llamas and alpacas in a manner similar to directions for cattle, or spot applied to areas of the body where flies tend to congregate.

Ivermectin and avermectins can also be used for fly control. Ivermectin is available in three different formulations, injectable, oral, and pour-on. Only topical ivermectin is useful for controlling flies. However, topical ivermectin can promote anthelmintic resistance of internal parasites and thus is generally not recommended in llamas and alpacas. Avermectin ear tags and strips are available for cattle. While it is rare to apply ear tags to camelids, the ear tag strips could be attached to a neck collar to provide some fly control.

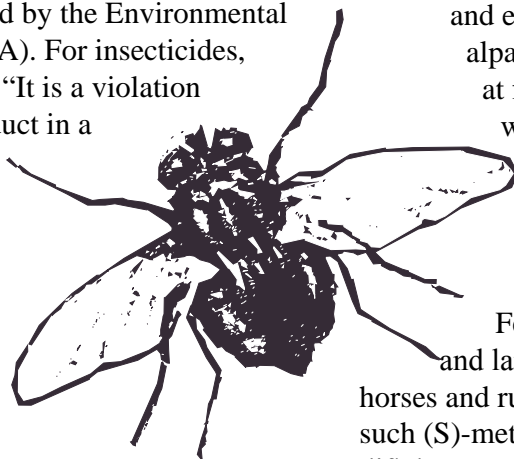
Dust bags and rubs can provide effective fly control and environmental enrichment for llamas and alpacas. Multiple products and kits are available at feed stores and online. These work best when placed in high traffic areas where camelids will have to pass under them daily. Fly baits, fly traps, and fly tape are also helpful fly controls, particularly inside enclosed areas like barns.

Feed through insect growth regulators (IGR) and larvicides are available for fly control in horses and ruminant livestock. Insect growth regulators such (S)-methoprene (Altosid and Dipteracide), and diflubenzuron (ClariFly) are fed to the animals and the compounds are passed in the feces, where they stop fly larvae from maturing into adult flies. Altosid is a very specific IGR that primarily works on horn flies in cattle. ClariFly has efficacy against house flies, stable flies, face flies, and horn flies and has products available for horses, cattle, swine, sheep, and goats.

For llamas and alpacas, you would want to use a product suitable for sheep or goats. This can be mixed into a grain or feed supplement. There are also sheep and goat mineral mixes that contain ClariFly and have low copper levels that are safe for llamas and alpacas. Rabon is a feed through organophosphate that kills the fly larvae in the feces. It is suitable for control of all types of flies that affect livestock. There are Rabon products that are labeled for horses, cattle, swine, sheep, goats, and wildlife. If using a mineral product containing Rabon, then choose one suitable for sheep and goats that will have a low copper content.

***Editors' Request:*** If any one is using an IGR product, please send a note to [rmlaeditors@gmail.com](mailto:rmlaeditors@gmail.com) to let us know what you think.

*continued on the next page*

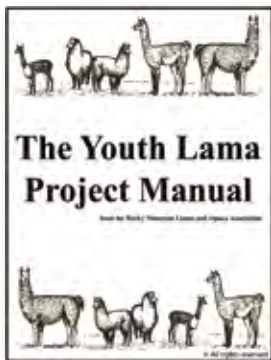


# RMLA Youth Manual

32 pages of jam packed information just for the Lamas and Lama Youth

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# Truly Amazin'

Is what the volunteers & contributors of Southwest Llama Rescue can accomplish. \*Help Is Always Needed: your time and money go a long way. \*Contact: [www.SouthwestLlamaRescue.org](http://www.SouthwestLlamaRescue.org) or [plenaryllama@yahoo.com](mailto:plenaryllama@yahoo.com) or 184 Hoofbeat Trl, Kerrville, TX 78028 \*Designate SWLR as your charity while shopping online at such stores as [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)

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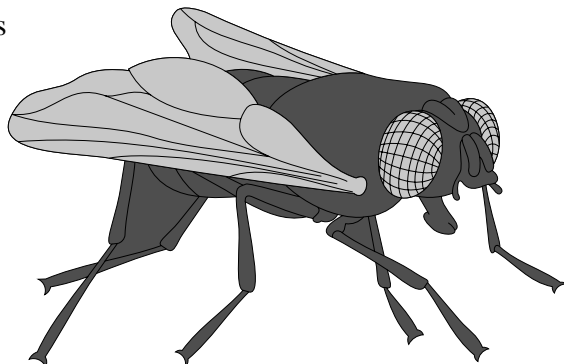
100% by donations. Ad paid for by SWLR [www.facebook.com/Rescue.Llamas](http://www.facebook.com/Rescue.Llamas)



Ask The CSU VET Team I: Fly Control for Llamas and Alpacas continued

Parasitic wasps work by laying wasp eggs into the fly pupa in feces. The wasp eggs hatch and the larval offspring consume the fly larva, killing it, and then develop into additional parasitic wasps. Parasitic wasps are purchased in bags and spread around the stables and pens or in the case of llamas and alpacas, they can be mixed directly in dung piles. The release rate of parasitic wasps is 7,500 wasps per 10 llamas or alpacas (<https://greenmethods.com/fly-control/>).

Other methods of fly control include general husbandry techniques such as picking stalls daily, keeping a dry environment, and appropriate composting of bedding and waste away from animal pens and housing. These are recommended as a part of any fly control management strategy. Flies cease activity on cooler days and as it gets dark so implementing a pasture turn out schedule that coincides with a decrease in fly activity can be beneficial as well.



Ultimately, there are many ways to address fly control and different methods can be used synergistically. To have the best effect, fly control treatments should start before flies become a problem. Insect growth regulators, larvicides, or parasitic wasps should be initiated at least 30 days before flies typically emerge to help stop them from replicating while numbers are low. In the Rocky

Mountain region, these may be started as early as April. This can be followed with topical treatments when flies are more apparent but make sure that you do it soon enough to have an impact. Fly control should be continued until 30 days past the first frost. Work with your veterinarian to discuss different options for fly control. Having a plan and being ready for fly control season will go a long way to minimize these pests.



# Consider Llama Bonds When Adopting

By Lynda Liptak, Albuquerque, NM

Usually llamas are born into a relationship-filled herd. They start with being welcomed by all the other llamas at birth when bonds are formed. Ideally, the cria have other crias to play with and learn about interactions and appropriate behaviors in their family dynamics. Having other adult llamas beyond the mother is very helpful in their development. Whether the bonds are maintained or broken is usually dependent upon their human caretakers.

Understanding there are competing wants and needs, it is my wish that we consider the needs of the llama and try to accommodate their social bonds that are part of their health system. Although we can't maintain all the bonds we would like to, and some bonds are naturally cut in the course of their lives, we can take their relationships into consideration when they are sent to new homes. Llamas are happy in a herd, and I find I am questioning what is the number that makes a herd?



Note: guard llamas are often requested as a single llama. They can bond with other species. Yes, this is true, but they can guard very well in pairs – one llama scouting and protecting the perimeter and the other llama staying with their charges. I believe this is a better solution. They speak the same language, work better together, and have a better chance at protection and surviving an attempted attack. I remind those requesting a guard llama that llamas are only a part of a multi-layered defense.

I find that as I get to know the llamas that come through Southwest Llama Rescue (SWLR), I see the benefit of keeping llama families intact. This is often a challenge if the llama family is large. In fact, the most requested adoption is for one or two llamas. Very rarely more than two, and when we get requests for two guards, it is likely because it is known our policy is that they are adopted in pairs.

Occasionally the request is for one llama; as the companion to an existing llama who lost their llama friend - and the kind owner understands that they need company. When the size of property is limiting, or the resources for raising and feeding llamas is scarce, a two-llama herd is certainly a benefit to the llamas needing a home and very much appreciated. But if there is the ability to consider more than one bond, then my preference for llama adoptions is really a minimum of three, with four being better.

I recently had the great luck to be contacted by a family interested in two llamas for adoption. After conducting the site visit and meeting with them, I was very happy they were interested in having llamas as they were perfect candidates with ideal facilities and pasture; as well as the desire to learn about llamas, proper care, and handling. But, I had a conundrum.

Having a family of four that needed a home, I assessed two candidate llamas in that family were possible for them; I knew I would have to break some strong bonds (in my assessment). This is an agony that I wrestle with nearly every time there is a request for adoption. Wanting two llamas to start out with should be easier, common sense tells us. And, if I had a pair of appropriate llamas that needed to be separated from the herd, that would have been a great answer. The truth is, I could break up a family of four that came in about 4 months ago and deliver two to the wonderful new adopters and send the remaining two to another home, when one comes up. I conceded that a separation was necessary in order to place these llamas

*continued on the next page*



*Consider Llama Bonds When Adopting, continued*

and tried to console my guilt with the fact that, hey, they are after all surrendered and there is no guarantee that we can keep them together.

So, the family wanted to come over and see the llamas and watch their interaction. For background, the human family planned to use them for guards for their soon-to-be goat herd. I was not certain the llamas would be good guards, but thought we should try it out as part of their security system. We had two females who were a little skittish, but one started to allow me to feed her up close. The other two llamas in their group were a mother and a nursing cria. The exact relationship or lineage is not known; this is true for 95% or more of the surrenders that we take in. Perhaps they are all related or perhaps not.

In any case, they were close to each other from the same herd, had been through some rough times (all around 5-8 years old except for the cria); two were known to likely have had crias that had perished. The mother was the leader of the group who missed the herd of origin and all the bonds she had. I know this because she paced the fence line looking beyond to the horizon for a month after they arrived. They had come from a large herd of about 26 llamas in Jefferson, Colorado, and they were the only females. They were wise to predators, having roamed on hundreds of acres all their lives and they were survivors. What they needed was good care and handling to build trust in humans.

I let my wish be known that I would prefer the family stay together and that in my opinion, they would be more effective and safer being together. In fact, I find that they move together so well that it is very easy to manage the herd of four as they follow each other and learn from each other very well. When working on trust with the most comfortable one in the bunch, the others are watching and learning.

And, in the Camlidynamics fashion (read *The Camelid Companion* by Marty McGee

Bennett, a wonderful resource), “packing” the catch pen with multiple llamas while handling and training, is an excellent technique. They feel safer in a bunch and I can spread out my enthusiasm across all four. A half hour spent on 4 llamas will be enough for them, while a half hour on one llama or two llamas may be way too much for recent rescues and cause too much stress.

During the visit by the adopting family, I introduced them to all the llamas and explained the relationships they had and how the llama groups interact. It was clear to them the four had a strong bond. And, to my joy and relief, they agreed to adopt the herd of four. I will check in on them and mentor with great appreciation for the generosity of these new llama caretakers.

*About Lynda & SWLR: Lynda has been rescuing and training llamas since 2009. She is presently a Director of Southwest Llama Rescue in Albuquerque, NM. During 2020, over 10,000 hours were donated by volunteers to accomplish rescue and care, feeding, medical care, and transportation (over 10,000 miles) of over 100 llamas/alpacas. Over 50 llamas/alpacas were placed in permanent homes, or re-homed, or into permanent foster care. Over 40 llamas/alpacas are in temporary foster care. Area of rescue includ most states in the western United States.*

(See SWLR Ad on page 7 :-)



New Llama Owners: Derrick, Jen, JJ, and Felicity.



## Rattlesnake Bites in Llamas and Alpacas

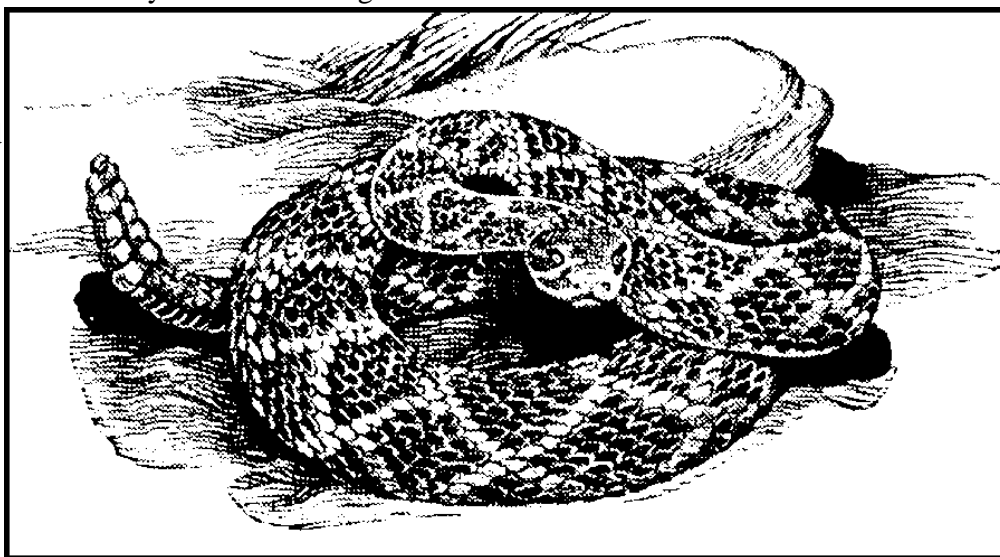
Rattlesnake bites are seen in patients of multiple species at the CSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital every year, including camelids. While rattlesnake bites are not a very common occurrence in camelids, it is important to know what to do if the situation arises. Most venomous snake bites of domestic animals in North America are due to snakes of the subfamily Crotalinae and genus *Crotalus*, which includes rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths. Fatality due to snake bites is variable amongst regions and species of snake. Furthermore, the amount of venom injected into the animal can depend on the age of the snake. It is commonly thought that a younger snake is more likely to inject all of its venom at once, while up to 20% of snake bites may be a “dry bite” where no envenomation occurs. However, any snake bite is potentially fatal and is always considered an emergency. If a bite is witnessed or suspected, veterinary care should be sought out as quickly as possible.

Snake bites can occur anywhere on the body. The most common place a rattlesnake bite will occur in the llama or alpaca is on the head, face, or muzzle, as camelids are curious creatures and are generally bitten while inspecting the snake. The clinical signs seen with snake bites depend on the type of venom injected. There are two major types of snake venom, called hemotoxic and neurotoxic venom. Hemotoxic venom generally causes massive tissue swelling, tissue death, pain, and blood coagulation abnormalities, which can cause uncontrolled bleeding. Neurotoxic venom may cause less tissue swelling than hemotoxic venom but can have major effects on the musculoskeletal and nervous system, such as paralysis and respiratory collapse. Other

signs that may be seen are puncture wounds at the site of the bite, increased salivation, lethargy, weakness, muscle fasciculations, and in more severe cases seizures or coma.

If you suspect your llama or alpaca has suffered a snake bite, you should try to keep the animal calm

and minimize activity that can increase the heart rate and more rapidly distribute the venom in the body. No attempt should be made to tourniquet the area of the bite, cut the wound, hot or cold compress the area, or remove the venom in



any manner, as these procedures are likely to worsen the distribution of toxin and local tissue damage. If the bite occurs near the muzzle, rapid swelling of the nasal passages can restrict the animal's ability to breathe. A rigid yet flexible tube (such as a short section of a small stomach tube or other rubber tube) roughly the size of the nostril may be temporarily inserted into the nose to the nasal pharynx to maintain an open airway before swelling completely occludes the nasal passages.

Although emergency treatment immediately following a snake bite is paramount, there are longer-term effects that one should be aware of. For example, infection and tissue necrosis of the bite location is possible, and the site will likely need to be monitored for several weeks until full resolution. Notably, animals can have blood clotting abnormalities for several weeks following a bite, and some may require blood or plasma transfusion. Hospitalization may be recommended for several days following a snake bite, depending on the clinical signs.

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### *Rattlesnake Bites in Llamas and Alpacas, continued*

There are no specific medical treatments for rattlesnake bites that are proven to be efficacious in camelids. Local tissue swelling and systemic collapse can occur over a period of minutes to hours. However, it is not possible to predict how severe the medical complications will be at the time of the bite.

We recommend that camelids bitten by a rattlesnake be examined and monitored by a veterinarian for at least 24 hours so that progression of the clinical signs can be observed, and appropriate treatment can be rapidly instituted. Administration of rattlesnake antivenom is most beneficial when administered soon after the bite to slow or decrease the progression of local and systemic damage.

However, it is difficult to determine which animals will benefit most from antivenom at the time of the bite. If rapid swelling of the tissue surrounding the bite, blood or serum oozing from the skin, difficulty breathing, or recumbency with shock are observed, then antivenom may provide benefit. Antibiotic treatment is indicated to control infection at the site of the bite. Intravenous fluid treatment is beneficial for patients showing signs of

systemic shock. In cases of swelling of tissues around the airway, a tracheostomy may be necessary. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as flunixin meglumine or meloxicam may provide pain relief, decrease local swelling, and help mitigate systemic inflammation. Corticosteroids such as dexamethasone have also been used when treating rattlesnake bites in llamas and alpacas but there is no evidence that they provide more benefit than NSAIDs.

Knowing the environmental preferences and habits of rattlesnakes can be helpful in aiding prevention. Snakes are most likely to be encountered in warm months (April through October). Areas near water, rocky outcroppings, wood piles, or tall grasses should be regarded as areas for potential snake encounters. It is often reported that guinea hens can be a deterrent for rattlesnakes as they tend to harass snakes and sometimes may kill them. If you encounter a dead snake, take extreme caution in handling it, as reflex bites and envenomation can still occur. Additionally, it is important to remember that while usually only one animal is bitten, several animals can be affected at the same time, and passively monitoring the herd following a snake bite of one animal is prudent.



# Teaching the Young, Both Camelids and Humans

By Marty McGee Bennett - Camelidynamics.com

Kids and llamas are a winning combination. Llamas are the perfect size for kids and are suitable for even really young children. Their soft footpads are much safer for those kids new to livestock than a horse's hoof. Llamas don't bite and they are seldom aggressive. There

A few modifications in the way that animals are selected and used might help raise the success rate and help those few camelid non-conformists cooperate and graduate with their classmates. Llamas that are a bit difficult aren't necessarily unsuitable for a youth program, in fact, they may be the perfect vehicle for teaching patience, tolerance and humility—provided they are paired with the appropriate youthful handler and both are properly supervised. In any case it would be nice to honor the camelid participant's unique personality just as we do the with the human participant.



It appears common for most youth leaders to use very young llamas for their programs, collecting weanlings from a pool of breeders and offering training in return for the use of the animals. Often breeders will donate the animals and the sale of the trained llamas helps to support the program. In either case it is important for the longevity of the program to turn out a saleable and desirable animal at the end of the program. Youth programs are also a wonderful opportunity to introduce the joys of owning and working with camelids to children and by extension their parents. Working with an animal offers a young person the opportunity to learn about camelids specifically and animals and animal care in general, as well as the chance to learn responsibility, understanding and sportsmanship. One would hope that compassion, empathy, and a reverence for other species is also on the agenda.

is no shortage of camelid related activities in which to participate. Many breeders are thrilled to have their young llamas participate in youth clubs and will make young male llamas available at no charge.

I have had a number of discussions over the years with llama youth leaders who have had occasional difficulties with some of their camelid recruits. I have also had a number of active or former youth program llamas show up at clinics with behavioral problems. Some of these animals learn to lay down and refuse to get up for any reason; others have become intractable either spitting, kicking, or charging their young handlers. Certainly many llamas graduate from youth programs as well trained and well-adjusted animals, unfortunately there are others that fail miserably.

I have taught clinics and workshops for youth groups but I have never supervised a youth program. I am not a mother so the following suggestions are based on my knowledge of camelids and my intuition about children and animals together, not on a great deal of direct experience with children.

In my experience, llamas are best weaned no earlier than six months and preferably even later at seven to eight months of age. In the case of young males it depends in part on their sexual precociousness. In my opinion, the last few weeks with mom and the herd are very important, not necessarily from a nutritional standpoint rather from an adjustment point of view. I think as youngsters get older and begin to push the limits

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*Teaching the Young, Both Camelids and Humans, continued*  
of appropriate behavior with their mother and other senior herd mates they learn valuable lessons about their place in the herd (world) and learn to have respect for authority.

I think it is particularly useful when weaning young males to put them in with an older assertive gelding that will keep the young boys in line. This often prevents the emergence of a dominant young male who may become hyper-aggressive as he gets older (another valid use for keeping a few geldings around on your farm even if you run a breeding operation).

Weaning young males at 4-5 months and starting them immediately as youth projects is a lot to ask all at once. Even if you wean at six months or later it would be wise, in my opinion, to allow a month or so for the youngsters to get over the shock of weaning and perhaps a change of location and herd mates prior to beginning formal training with children. Training methods that don't rely on force and physical superiority are very useful for children given their smaller size. Llamas that are cornered and grabbed figure out pretty fast that small children can't catch and halter them and will quickly become selectively obedient.

Working in a small catch pen and catching young animals with a wand and rope (see photo below) can help to convince young animals that young humans must also be obeyed. Attach a rope to a stick or wand. This



can be accomplished using a variety of techniques. I use a specialized dressage whip (4ft long) with a clip attached to the end and an 11ft rope that can be attached to the clip. You can opt for a less sophisticated rig by tying a lightweight rope to the end of a long lightweight dowel. Stand well away from the animal and use the full length of the dowel and rope.

Hold one end of the rope and use the dowel or wand to guide the rope over the top of the animal's head. It is best to stand behind the eye of the animal as you guide the rope over the head. Once the rope is over the head bring the other end of the rope into your hand and detach the wand or stick. Now you can use the rope to steady the animal as you make your approach. This is much easier for most people, particularly children, than the process of cornering a llama and catching the animal by grabbing it around the neck. Llamas caught this way (i.e., wand and rope) realize very quickly that there is no point in running or struggling to get away and will become increasingly cooperative. It won't take long before the handler can walk up to the animal and just hand himself the rope and proceed to haltering.

In the beginning, it helps to work with two or more young llamas in the training pen together or in adjoining training pens. When working with more than one animal in the catch pen, it is better to have one child at a time enter the training pen to work with his assigned animal, while the other half of the team watches and offers input from outside the pen. Having more than one child in the pen at the same time is confusing for both the animals and the children.

The youth leaders I have spoken with almost universally pair up the youngest and therefore smallest animals with the youngest handlers. This would seem to be an ideal arrangement; young llamas are smaller and seem less intimidating for younger children. If you think more about this arrangement, there are many potential problems. Young camelids are often the most frightened, the least experienced and have the shortest attention span; the same is true of young handlers! This is rather like the blind leading the blind. I would suggest that using experienced well-behaved tolerant older geldings is a much better way to begin with young children. Children in general and especially young children are impatient and are often abrupt in their handling methods. A larger older gelding is much better able to handle the stress of dealing with a youngster and will set the child up for success.

To borrow from the horse world, it would not be appropriate for very young children to work with foals or breaking and training young green horses. Young inexperienced horse enthusiasts learn about horse handling from older horses that have the maturity and patience to be kind in the face of mistakes. Most young horses are not in a position to do that—they are inexperienced and immature themselves and are much more dependent on their instincts. Even though camelids

*continued on page 16*

# Carding Your Llama Fiber

By Kathy Stanko, Chair RMLA Fiber Committee

Carding fiber is the process used to align all the fibers in one direction so that it may be spun. Carding may be done using hand carders, a drum carder, or a big, fast machine at a fiber mill. The methods and the tools used are limitless. Several members of the fiber committee have shared their thoughts and preferences.

## When a Hand Carder Rules

By Ellen Schreiner, Casper, WY

I am lucky enough to have both a drum carder and several hand carders. Of course, they mostly do the same thing; however, the drum carder wins out on time saved, on volume, straightening fibers, blending different fibers, and full color-blending.

But, when I want to do mixed color blending, with two or more definite hues still present, I prefer my hand carders. That way I can spin single yarns with beautiful different colors. Drum carders tend to mix them in too thoroughly, no matter how careful I am.



Another way I prefer the hand carders is when I want to spin woolen. This can make a softer and more fluffy yarn for knitting, or other special projects. This works well with llama or alpaca and wool blends.

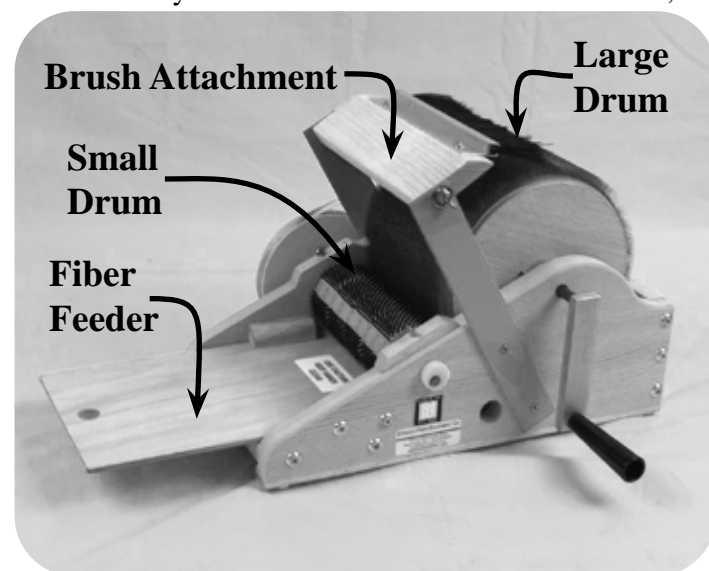
## Thoughts on Drum Carding Llama and Alpaca Fiber

By Nancy Wilson, Camp Verde, AZ

In 2018, I was completing my In Depth Study (IDS) for the Olds College Master Spinner Program. The purpose of my IDS was to use double-coated llama fiber to create different wool and mohair blends and evaluate the resulting yarns for end use. I also researched what is involved in the dehairing process. Dehairing decreases the amount of end product and costs more. Checking the Zeilinger Wool website, roving from exotic fiber is \$11/pound and \$17/pound for dehairing.

I started my IDS by requesting donations of raw, unwashed, double-coated llama fiber and received a lot of donations from RMLA members. After washing, the first step in the process was to assess the llama fiber for staple length. I divided the fiber into shorter staple length (approximately 2" or less) and longer staple length (longer than 2"). The easiest way to ensure the samples represented a wide cross section of fibers was to create drum-carded batts.

I used my Strauch Petite drum carder for all carding. It comfortably creates a one-ounce batt. For each batt,



I selected three of the shorter samples and one of the longer samples. I made piles of the different fiber lengths on my worktable and then put each pile on the carder in order. Using the longer staple length as a base made it easier to remove the batt cleanly, with fewer fibers left on the drum. This created a layered effect on the drum. The batt ended up consisting of one layer of long staple followed by three layers of short staple and a final layer of long staple. I split the batt lengthwise into thirds and fed each piece back through the carder again, for a total of three passes.

I further randomized the batts by combining sections of different batts together. The end result was that I did lots of blending with just the llama fiber before proceeding on the wool and mohair blends.

For blending, I started each batt with a layer of the wool then alternated llama fiber with wool. I'm guessing that the scale structure of the wool fibers created a better base and left less fiber on the drum, which was important

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in maintaining the blend percentages. I created blends of 25% wool/75% llama, 50% wool/50% llama, and 75% wool/25% llama. During this process, I learned that pressing down on the brush attachment helped to transfer any fiber from the lick-in (feeder drum) to the large drum. Again, each batt was carded two subsequent passes after the initial application and using the last-off, first-on method from *Aunt Millie's Guide to Processing*. For blending, I generally split the batt into thirds lengthwise between passes. Using my hands, I both lengthen the batt and make it wider by pulling gently. This in effect thins out the batt prior to feeding each piece through the carder for subsequent passes and helps blend the fibers more quickly.

I still use this method when creating batts. If I'm creating a blend, I generally lay down a layer of the wool fiber before adding the llama or alpaca fiber. A smooth, longer staple base makes it easier to remove the batt. Recently, I have been carding pre-dyed wool blend batts or roving with a coordinating dyed roving of llama/alpaca blends. I break each roving or batt into eight lengths. The final drum-carded batt will consist of a section of llama/alpaca blend and a portion of dyed roving or batt all blended together. If I want a homogeneous blend, then I will card each batt a total of three times. If I want a not-so-blended batt I will card a total of two times. I have found this a fun way to blend some of the lovely wild batts and roving and support some of the indie dyers out there.

When I spin these batts, I decide whether I want the subtle differences in color to be more or less noticeable. If I want the color variation to more noticeable, then I spin a thicker yarn. If I want less variation, then I can



spin a thinner yarn. For spinning, I split the batt into either four or five pieces lengthwise.

This technique is a great way to make a small amount of fiber go further or to add some color to a blend. You can create either bold or subtle effects.

## **Impatient for the Final Product** **By Kathy Stanko, Whitewater, CO**

Being the impatient person that I am, I have taken a number of short cuts in my carding techniques. I learned carding techniques years ago at a fiber preparation class at the Estes Park Wool Market. Then, I adapted these techniques to do my own thing.

Using a fiber mill with a big, fast machine, I have my fiber prepared into roving. I sell the roving to spinners or have it hand spun. But, I hold back those special fibers to do my own thing: blending! I have stashes of sari silk (recycled, colorful fiber from saris worn in India and elsewhere). Yak, bamboo, silk, rosewood, and sparkling Angelina.

I have a Patrick Green Little Deb carder. The arrangement and size of the teeth on the carder are positioned for fine fibers such as llama and alpaca.



Before I begin, I decide the proportions of llama fiber to special fiber that I want to use depending on the final effect. My carder easily holds 1 ounce of fiber, about 30 grams. I weigh out the grams of llama; then weigh the grams of the special fiber for a total of 30 grams. I write the weights down to ensure I remain consistent in my proportions.

I feed a bit of llama fiber into the carder, enough to cover the drum lightly. Then, I either feed the special fiber into the carder a bit at a time or sometimes I even just lay the special fiber on the top of the drum in a random fashion. I use a burnishing brush which I use to pack down the fiber on the drum. A word of caution here: don't put too much pressure on the brush or you will pull out some of the teeth on the drum like I have done!

Once I have fed all of the fibers for this batt through the carder once, I pull the batt off the drum then separate it into a number of long strips. I pull both lengthwise and widthwise on each strip to thin it out, then feed the strip through the carder again. Once I have fed everything through the feeder this second time, I am done. I continue to use the same measurements and process for the rest of the batts of this special blend.



are much smaller and therefore not as dangerous as horses the same consideration for the animal's mental well-being is appropriate. Most of the problems I see with young camelids are the result of starting them too soon or the inappropriate pairing of very young animals with very young children. The camelid doesn't understand what is being asked or is frightened and becomes withdrawn or belligerent to protect himself.

It is much easier in my experience to go slowly and prevent problems than it is to correct the problems once they appear. Short lessons with lots of breaks and food breaks are also advisable for youth animals. I do not suggest hand feeding necessarily, however, taking frequent breaks and allowing the animal to graze or munch on succulent hay while the child is holding the lead rope may help to create a more pleasant expectation about training and training sessions.

The use of obstacles in training sessions is wonderful for both children and camelids and can be introduced almost as soon as the young animal learns to lead. Children should be encouraged to lead with a long lead and to give light signals. It can be very helpful to have children participate in a role-playing exercise in which the children

pair up with a partner. Half the children play the part of the animal and put a halter on their head. The other half of the children play the part the handler and can lead the "human camelids." The children will learn first-hand how abrupt and heavy

signals are both unnecessary and uncomfortable. They will be much more aware of how they treat their animal charges when leading them. Or, you can use the 'inflatable llamas' shown in this photo above.

Obstacles help to get both handler and animal focused and are much more interesting than walking around in

a circle. Obstacles are the most useful when they can be made easier. Many obstacles are designed to be used only in their most difficult form. For example, a bridge with ramps is not useful for training if it cannot be lowered, a children's wading pool used as a water obstacle cannot be made easier. It certainly doesn't create a sense of teamwork when obstacle training means dragging a frightened young animal over an obstacle until he figures out it is safe.

Plastic, plywood, 4x4's and PVC pipe are all wonderful obstacles and can be used creatively to create very challenging obstacles that can be made easier if need be. When young animals are reluctant to walk on a new surface, it is useful to create an aisle way between



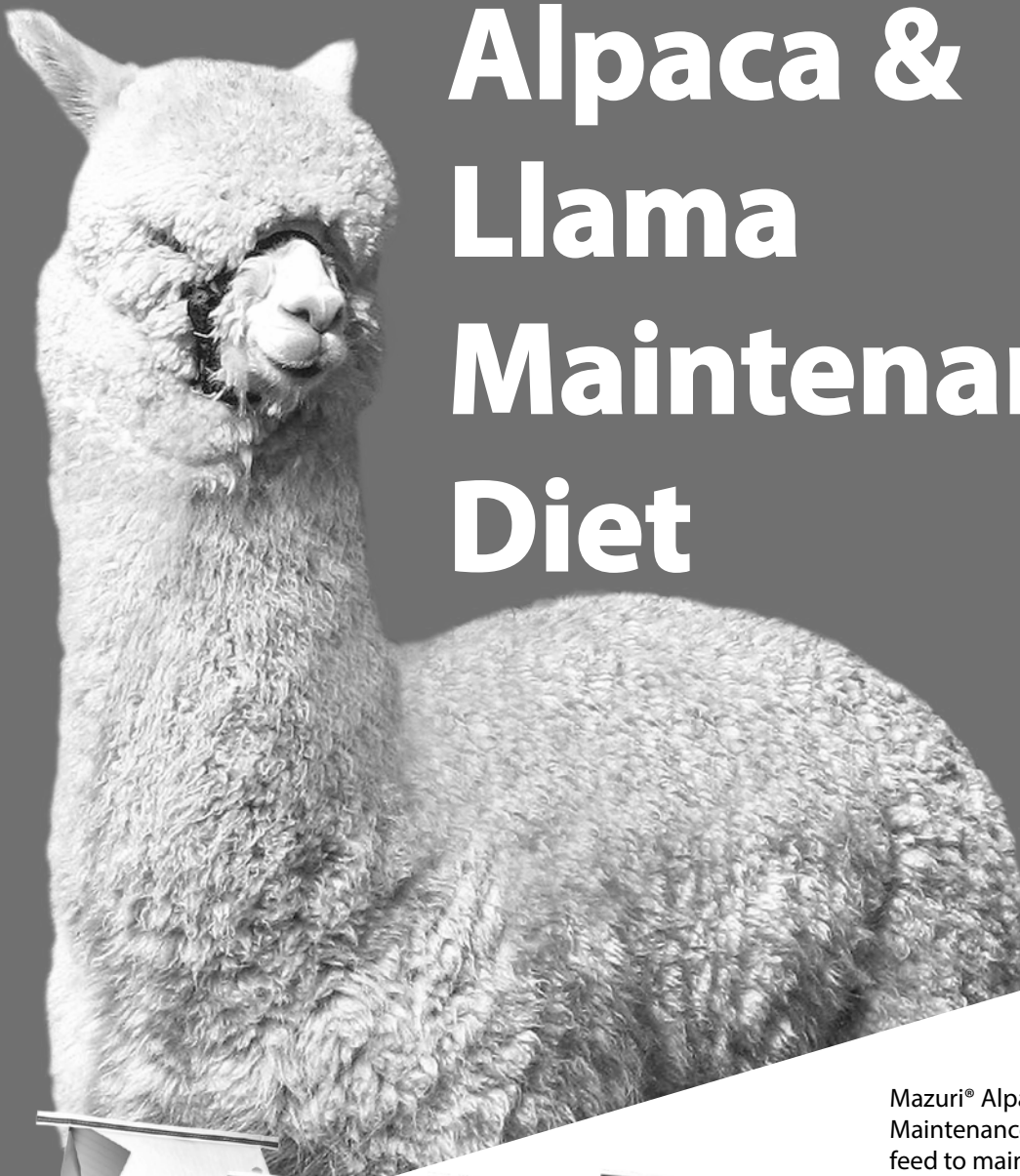
two pieces of the scary substance. You can gradually move the two pieces of plastic or plywood close together until the animal feels confident enough to walk over the new surface. Introducing new things gradually is much more respectful than forcing an animal into or over something scary.

I am not a particularly patient person and I use a technique to help me from hurrying my camelid students that youth leaders may find useful. When an animal refuses to come forward or try an obstacle, I employ my "potato rule": I use my lead rope to make sure that the llama focuses on the obstacle and does not back up—but I am totally quiet and I do not pull on the lead rope while I make myself count silently to thirty potatoes. This is about 30 seconds, not very long but usually long enough to allow the animal a chance to think. Many times, this is all that is necessary and the animal will try the obstacle.

Have some fun with all of this, be patient and experiment.







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# Pack Llama Trail Association News

Tom Seifert - LTA President

*Editors' Note: the following is an excerpt from the January 2021 Newsletter of the PLTA. We encourage our members interested in the challenges and fun of hiking and packing with llamas to check out this organization.*

WOW! What a year 2020 has been, and personally, I am glad to put it in the rearview mirror. With 20-20 hindsight, maybe we should have just skipped to 2021. Oh well, as we come to the end of this year, we look forward to all the positives of a new year. The Pack Llama Trail Association Board of Directors continues to fine tune and add materials to the website ([www.packllama.org](http://www.packllama.org)), brainstorm ideas for increasing membership, creating social media spots that highlight the role of the PLTA, and organize for future Trials and Challenges.

Two pack Trials were held during 2020 despite shutdowns and limitations posed by COVID19. The Virginia/N. Carolina Trial was a go in early Spring, as was the October Trial in Burns, Oregon. We had impressive llama showings with two llamas earning their Elite Packer status and several others getting started with their Basic and Advanced certifications. Congratulations to the owners and their llamas.



A vibrant and productive PLTA must provide its membership with the tools they need to make their lives with llamas more fruitful and fulfilling. Membership has requested more certifiers and currently that has been the



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Board's focus. We continue to aim for making certifier training easy and accessible so that Pack Trials and PLTA events can be frequent and readily available to all members.




During the year the PLTA has experimented with developing videos and images of obstacles to support written testing for potential certifiers. This has shown promise. The work continues and it is our hope to have a 'traveling' or social media type of test that one might work through to gain their certifier authorization. Open book testing and video conferencing is our direction. If this is something you would be interested in, please let us know.

Feedback from our “guinea pigs” in this endeavor, identifies the challenge of putting on a trial rather than the stress of taking a certifier exam that is the obstacle to increasing availability of pack trials. Helping you gain the confidence to host a trial, define mileage and



elevation for the courses, identify obstacles, be prepared for different scenarios, and doing it all with a smile is the goal of every member of the PLTA Board. Remember, we are only a phone call away for any questions you might have. So, jump in, let us help you with everything from planning your event to completing paperwork afterward.



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Some members have found an excellent way to start is to hold a Challenge. Challenges are less work and far less complex than a trial. They are a great way to get your feet wet before moving on to hosting a Trial. Check out the website [www.packllama.org](http://www.packllama.org) and read about what

the Challenge has to offer. Then, when you have a couple of free hours, grab your friends with llamas and head out of the pasture. It is a great way to prepare your llamas for the summer and fall packing seasons. Again, any questions, drop me an email or call.



# Dispelling the Myths About Guard Llamas

By Carol Reigh - Owner and President of Buck Hollow Llamas, Inc.

## Myth 1: Llamas are mean and aggressive and spitters

I'd like to begin by dispelling a myth that seems to be rampant in the alpaca community, and my guess as to how it possibly started and/or is perpetuated. That myth is, and I quote from the MAPACA President in the April 26, 2012 edition of the Harrisburg Patriot News, "A llama will spit at you just for the sake of spitting at you."

Consider this. If llamas are so mean and such awful spitters, why do the South Americans use them as their work horse carrying their goods to

town and transporting their children? If llamas are such spitters, why are they certified therapy animals with the Delta Society? If llamas are such spitters, why have they participated in the Rose Bowl parade? If llamas are such spitters, why are numerous pack outfitters utilizing them to carry the camping equipment for their clients? Don't - not for a moment - believe that these are special cases or perhaps the exception!

So, how has this rumor taken such a fierce hold? My guess is that one person passes it on to another and the myth continues with very few people questioning the validity of their statement. It is also my guess that the first people who said this did not make it up but did, in fact, experience a "beserk male or female" at a zoo or petting zoo. Or perhaps he/she bought a llama at an auction, with the intention of it being a guard, and the animal was beserk and was simply being passed on to someone else. We all know that beserk animal syndrome occurs in both llamas and alpacas, and it is the result of actions taken by the breeder or owner and is not the fault of the animal.

The truth is the average llama is naturally more calm and amenable than its cousin the alpaca, and anyone who owns both will certainly attest to this. This is not in any way a condemnation but is, rather, a fact. In South

America the alpaca is herded in from the mountains once a year, sheared and released. Which of the two camelids is going to be more calm about life; the one that lives intimately with the family or the one brought in once a year for shearing? Llamas seldom spit when being shorn, given shots, or during toenail trimming; spitting is not an everyday occurrence with a llama. If you do not believe me, pay the closest llama breeder a visit or perhaps do a little investigating on your own and learn why llamas are the oldest domesticated livestock and working animal known to man.

## Myth 2: All llamas are good guards

Just because a person is tall does not necessarily mean that person is a good basketball player; in the same way do not assume all llamas are going to be good guards. Even in the llama herd one or two arise as the guardians and the others simply chill out and let them do the patrolling and worrying about predators. By virtue of their size, they might discourage a would be predator, but a good guard will give the alarm call to alert all to a



potential threat, and even position itself between the herd and the danger. A good guard is constantly watching for danger.

## Myth 3: Males make better guards than females

This is not true. Both males and females make good guards but it is less expensive to purchase a gelding or male to be gelded than it is to purchase a female. Females make excellent guards but must be housed with females and geldings can be housed with either.

## Myth 4: Llamas do not have nice fiber

Overall, alpacas are known for their luxurious fiber but do not think, for a single minute, that you cannot get fine fiber from a llama. One of my studs consistently threw micron counts of under 20. In South America, "100% Alpaca" on a garment label is in reference to the grade, not the animal. Within that 100% alpaca garment


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there is llama fiber. Here in the US, the llama breeders have improved the fiber on their animals over the years. Again, find a llama farm that is serious about fiber and get your hands on the fiber to see for yourself.

### Eleven Things to Consider When Purchasing a Guard Llama:

1. Never buy an animal under 24 months to be a guard. It needs the herd to gain the confidence and experience of guarding. A young animal will simply run to safety faster than the rest of the herd or cower behind someone bigger. Your dollars should be buying you a Proven guard.
2. Intact males should guard only males. You do not need an injury resulting from your guard llama trying to breed one of your females.
3. A gelding can guard both males and females but it is vital that you ask if this gelding has ever been used to breed. If the answer is "I am not sure" then use him only with your males. An animal that has previous breeding experience will continue to try to breed a female.
4. A good guard will never guard you from your animals. The llama will be alert to potential predators but should never keep you from your herd.
5. A good guard animal will naturally be more aloof. You should expect to be able to halter and lead your guard llama but don't expect this one to give kisses and want attention. If an animal is too trusting, that llama will not make a good guard.
6. Don't be afraid to purchase a five, six or even a ten-year-old llama as a guard, as long as it has not broken down in its pasterns or legs. The animal



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should have good conformation and be sound.

7. If fiber is important to you, then get a guard with good fiber. I sell most of my raw fiber to alpaca owners who want to blend it with their alpaca fiber. If fiber is not important, get a light woolled llama because he/she will always look nice as the guard hairs serve to keep him/her clean of debris.
8. Don't buy a cheap animal at an auction! Auctions are often the place where people unload their problems (i.e. beserk animals). You are investing in the protection of your herd so go to a reputable llama breeder and pay the price for a guard. Ask to walk the animal. You want to make sure you can halter it and walk it because you will need to vaccinate, deworm and care for this llama. Don't settle for just any animal out of the field. Be sure to get a contract with your purchase.
9. Be prepared to pay a fair price for this protector of your herd (\$1500-\$2,000 is not an unreasonable amount). Consider how much you will save in insurance premiums by having a guard, the amount of fiber you will get and the calming effect the llama will have on the alpacas. Remember this animal has a big job to do.
10. Two llamas make a great team in guarding. If you can afford two, you will be amazed at how well they work together to give you maximum protection from predators. Early on, we used to say only one llama per flock or herd because two will bond with each other and ignore their charges. This is NOT true. Two llamas will work together and spell each other while one rolls or sunbathes.
11. I would be remiss in not offering you this warning. Most people who purchase guard llamas end up loving them because they know, first hand, they are not mean, aggressive spitters.

*This article is reprinted with permission from the author. Carol has been breeding and raising llamas for 20+ years and has been an active member of the llama community. She may be contacted at <https://buckhollowllamas.com>.*

# LLAMA LUNACY

By Mary Wickman  
Llama Lunacy  
Coordinator



*Editor's Note: This is a reprint from the Fall 2017 Journal.*

Llama Lunacy is held each year in conjunction with the Fairplay Llama Event. The Llama Lunacy is a small, easy obstacle course set up for children to lead a gentle llama through. The course is free and each child gets a ribbon and a coupon for free ice cream.

This year's event started off with rain and not too many people around so we were thinking that we would not have very many children go through the course. But the rain stopped at the start of the race and people lined the streets. The line for the Llama Lunacy started to form right away and we had the children taking the llama through the course well after the race was over.

Betty Hollman brought two super gentle llamas all the way from Oklahoma just for the event. Betty: Thank you 1000 times over! In addition we had several great volunteers to assist the children through the duck tunnel, across the plank, weaving the noodles, jumping the camp chairs, and through the hula-hoop (great photo opportunity for the parents).

Some of these children may become the future owners of llamas. You never know. Last year a young girl – maybe 5 or 6 years old – went through the course, she had a blank expression on her face the whole way – showed no happiness, no fear, just blank. When we got to the end of the course she flat out refused to let go of the lead rope; she had decided that she wanted that llama and was not going to let go. You just never know how you impress a young mind.



# Old Age, Twilight Years and Sunsets

Susi Hülsmeier-Sinay - Yellowstone Llamas

Old age is not a disease, even though sometimes it feels and looks like it. Every living thing will go through the stages of life that are predetermined at birth. Every stage has its place, its joys, its time. I can tell, now that I put my 64th birthday behind me, I am no young chicken anymore either. Am I the same person I was 20 or 10 years ago? Of course not! Same with our animals. Not so long ago, we trekked through the mountainous backcountry with our energetic and indefatigable camelid companion for days. Today, he comes limping out of the barn, his body language telling us “I am tired”. We look at him and see: he is old.

That’s okay. Unless an animal has a serious health issue, is in bad pain or otherwise incapable to have any



quality of life – old age is nothing to be ashamed of or to worry about. Now is the time to sit back, hang out in the pasture while the buddies go trekking, enjoy an extra serving of senior feed, and take it easy.

I am convinced that just like us humans, our llamas enjoy remembering the old days, dreaming of the many times they explored the trails, stood on hilltops taking in sweeping vistas and proudly carried loads into camp for their human friends. Yes, sure, maybe arthritis sets

in now and sitting down takes way longer than it used to. Yes, sure, the teeth are not what they used to be and chewing is a little harder. Eyesight may diminish, fleece doesn’t grow as fast or look as lush. But, oh, the sunrises and sunsets are just as magnificent to behold and the company of buddies in the stall still feels good and comforting.


I know people who are quick to “put down” an old animal before a predicted strong winter. They don’t want their animal “to suffer” through the cold months. Yes, the old get cold easier than their younger comrades. Just make sure there is extra straw for them to snuggle into



at night and get them one of those great blankets that offer extra warmth. Putting an animal down to “prevent” suffering does not seem to be a good strategy to me. It is important to watch the animal closely to determine any underlying health issues, any signs of serious pain. To me, it is important to step up the care a notch or two and recognize that my friend of many years needs me to be a little more observant of his needs and issues.

*continued on the next page*

Old age comes with breaking down of bodily functions and it is important to try and determine how much the breaking down impacts quality of life. Years ago, my beloved llama, Amadeus, suddenly fell down right in front of me one morning in the barn. It was a shock. Amadeus shook himself off, looked around in a daze for a few moments, then got up and resumed feeding. A friend recommended putting him down. He was 22 and, as far as I knew, in good health. He lived happily and actively for another 2 years. Amadeus enjoyed many more sunrises and sunsets and greeted me at the gate each morning to the end.

Yukon is 19.5 years old and due to persistent infections in both eyes probably at least half blind. He searches for his bucket with snackies every morning and sometimes turns it over by mistake. It is clear he cannot see it. But once he has consumed the senior feed with obvious relish, he faces the new day with optimism and surprising energy as he gallops a little lopsided down the hill to meet his friends. He is old. But there is grace in old age and there is value in the experiences of twilight years. And just because I would have the power to end it, I don't feel right to do it. I don't see serious suffering. Yukon is managing his old age and his handicap. And I support him. And to me, and him I am sure, every new sunrise is worth it. 

**FYI.** [www.HowToCatchALlama.com](http://www.HowToCatchALlama.com)  
Animal rescue site for people who need to catch llamas and alpacas.  
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# Nitrate vs. Nitrite – Do You Know the Difference?

By David L. Morris, DVM, PhD

*Editors' Note: Originally published via an Alpaca Breeders of the Rockies email blast- October, 2011. Nitrate poisoning is rare in camelids, but it can occur.*

Many species are susceptible to nitrate/nitrite poisoning, but cattle are affected most frequently. Ruminants are especially vulnerable because the organisms in the rumen (or first stomach) convert nitrate to ammonia. To accomplish this biochemical conversion, nitrite, an intermediate product, is produced. The problem is that nitrite is approximately 10 times more toxic than nitrate. Nitrate reduction and the associated nitrite production also occurs in the caecum of the horse, but not to the same extent as in ruminants.

Acute intoxication results in the inability of the animal to transport oxygen in the blood. The nitrite reacts with the red blood cell and prevents the cell from adequately carrying the needed oxygen to the body tissues. The nitrite also affects the smooth muscle of blood vessels by resulting in a secondary lowering of the blood pressure.

Signs of nitrite poisoning usually appear suddenly due to the oxygen deficit and lowered blood pressure. Rapid, weak heartbeat, subnormal body temperature, muscular tremors, weakness and lack of coordination are early signs of toxicity. Rapid breathing, anxiety and frequent urination are common. The clinical signs can vary from acute death to signs exhibited over days and weeks. Abortion and stillbirths may occur in some cattle. Prolonged excess nitrate exposure coupled with cold stress and inadequate nutrition may lead to the alert downer cow syndrome in pregnant beef cattle; sudden collapse and death can result.

Toxicity occurs most commonly in those animals unaccustomed to eating plants that contain excess nitrate. Crops that readily concentrate nitrate include cereal grasses (especially oats, millet and rye), corn, sunflower and sorghums. Weeds that commonly have high nitrate concentrations are pigweed, lamb's quarter, thistle, Jimson weed, fireweed (Kochia),

smartweed, dock and Johnson grass. Anhydrous ammonia and nitrate fertilizers and soils naturally high in nitrogen tend to increase nitrate content in forage.

Nitrate levels may be hazardous in ponds that receive extensive feedlot or fertilizer runoff; these types of waters may also contaminate shallow, poorly cased wells. Although nitrate concentrations are increasing in groundwater in the U.S., well water is rarely the sole cause of excess nitrate exposure. Water with high nitrate levels and significant coliform contamination has great potential to affect health adversely and lower productivity than do either nitrate of bacteria alone. Livestock losses have occurred during cold weather due to the concentrating effect of freezing which increases nitrate content of remaining water in stock tanks.

Excess nitrate in plants is generally associated with damp weather conditions and cool temperature (55 degrees F.), although high concentrations are also likely to develop when growth is rapid during hot, humid weather. Drought conditions, however, particularly if occurring when plants are immature, may leave the vegetation with high nitrate content. Decreased light, cloudy weather and shading associated with crowding conditions can also cause increased concentration of nitrates within plants.

Nitrate, which does not selectively accumulate in fruits or grain, is found chiefly in the lower stalk. Anything that stunts growth increases nitrate accumulation in the lower part of the plant. Nitrate in plants can be converted to nitrites under the proper conditions of moisture, heat and microbial activity after harvesting. Nitrate levels of covered hay will not change once the hay is cut, but grazed forages still change concentration on a daily basis. Large, uncovered bales with excess nitrate are potentially dangerous if stored outside; rain or snow can leach and subsequently concentrate most of the total nitrate present into the lower third of these bales.

The following table is a guideline for cattle for interpreting nitrate (NO<sub>3</sub>) analysis of feed samples:

| ppm Nitrate(NO <sub>3</sub> ) Effects on Cattle |  |
|---|--|
| 0-3,000 ppm                                     | Considered safe.   |
| 3,000-6,000 ppm                                 | Moderately safe in most situations; limit to 50% of the total ration for stressed animals. |
| 6,000-9,000 ppm                                 | Potentially toxic depending on situation; should not be the only source of feed.           |
| 9,000 ppm and above                             | Dangerous and will often cause death.  |

*continued on the next page*

Guidelines to follow to reduce the risk of nitrate toxicity include:

1. Avoid excessive application of manure or nitrogen fertilizer.
2. Do not graze potentially dangerous forage on cool, cloudy days.
3. When harvesting forage sorghum and Sudan grass, raise the cutter bar 6-12 inches to exclude the base of the stalk. This will also minimize harvesting many weed species that accumulate nitrate when shaded.
4. Delay harvesting any stressed forages. A week of favorable weather is required for plants to reduce accumulated nitrate.

In recent years hay has been tested to contain relatively higher Nitrates. But this year (2011) it's especially concerning. It's important to have the hay tested for Nitrate-NO<sub>3</sub> this year. Have your hay producer supply a Nitrate-NO<sub>3</sub> test in addition to the RFV (Relative Feed Value) test or find a hay probe and test it yourself *before you buy it*.

*Editor's Note:*

Occasionally testing labs will give you the Nitrate test in the form of Nitrate Nitrogen (NO<sub>3</sub>-N) or Potassium Nitrate (KNO<sub>3</sub>) instead of NO<sub>3</sub>.

To convert:

|   |   |       |   |
|---|---|-------|---|
| Potassium Nitrate(KNO <sub>3</sub> )  | x | 0.613 | = Nitrate (NO <sub>3</sub> )            |
| Nitrate Nitrogen(NO <sub>3</sub> -N)  | x | 4.43  | = Nitrate (NO <sub>3</sub> )            |
| Nitrate Nitrogen (NO <sub>3</sub> -N)   | x | 7.22  | = Potassium Nitrate(KNO <sub>3</sub> )  |
| Potassium Nitrate(KNO <sub>3</sub> )  | x | 0.139 | = Nitrate Nitrogen (NO <sub>3</sub> -N) |
| Nitrate (NO <sub>3</sub> )  | x | 1.63  | = Potassium Nitrate(KNO <sub>3</sub> )  |
| Nitrate (NO <sub>3</sub> )  | x | 0.226 | = Nitrate Nitrogen (NO <sub>3</sub> -N) |
| These values are often expressed in ppm (parts-per-million)<br>Parts-per-million is actually a percentage of a million.<br>One part per million would be 1/1,000,000 = 0.00010%<br>1% would be 10,000 ppm (i.e 10000/1000000=.01) |   |       |   |



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# A Poem for Feeding

(Presented about 1990/1992)

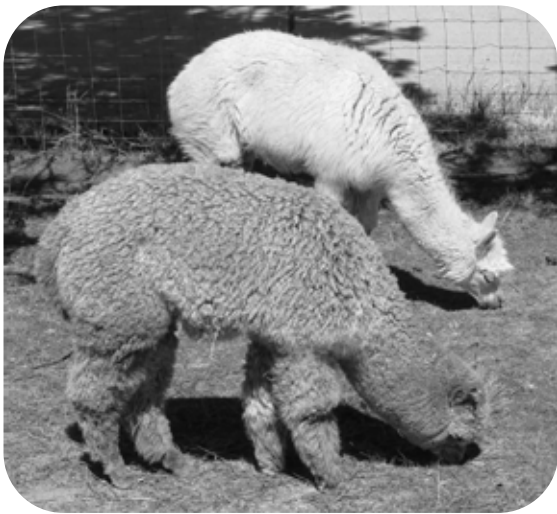
LaRue W. Johnson, DVM, PhD Professor  
Department of Clinical Sciences Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523

*Editors' Note: Ron and I discovered this poem when we were doing 'clean-up' work on the website. Now, with joy, we share it with our readers.*

"We feed our horses hay, with oats,  
With grass for cows and sheep and goats.  
Chickens look for grain to eat,  
While ducks find worms and dogs get meat.  
Cats have meat and milk and fish,  
To each its own peculiar dish.  
Some are fussy, others not,  
But pigs of course will eat the lot.

Now when it comes to camelids,  
It seems the knowledge ends.  
Yet their enlightened owners will  
Never starve their friends.  
Each new day there's a new form of pellet,  
The value of which not all of us can tell it.  
So I'm here to tell you with my usual sage,  
That llamas will do well with quality forage."

hw



**Postscript from The Journal Volunteers**

Ron, Marilyn,  
Kathy,

## **LEADERS and FOLLOWERS**

**Leaders are incomplete on their own. They are the reflection of the support of their followers.**

**Followers are the walls and roof to the foundation set up by the leaders.**

*- Chandan Barik*

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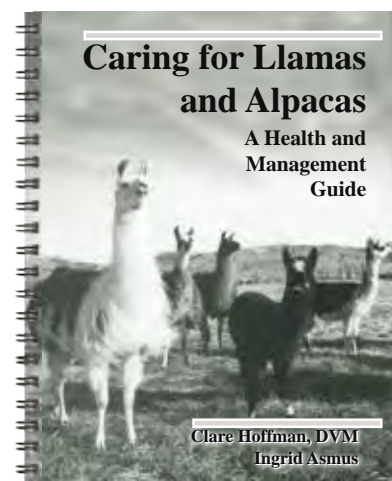
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