

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ALPACA BREEDERS' SOCIETY

September 2024

Volume 11, Issue 7



WINTER WONDERLAND IN KZN

Pretty normal for Europe
and the US but definitely
not normal for Wendy's
alpacas at Curry's Post.
Here Iktomi weighs up
his snowy options!



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The recent heavy snowfalls in KZN have caused complete chaos but from what Wendy told me her alpacas on the farm at Curry's Post rather enjoyed it. And hearing that bitterly cold weather was to hit Gauteng, Jan Leimer thoughtfully left 10 centimetres of fibre on the alpacas she was asked to shear there. Interesting that last weekend when this disastrous snow fell is the same weekend a year ago as the devastating biblical floods in the Western Cape. As I type this Wendy and Terrence are still busy clearing broken branches and debris.

Our 2024 crias are currently being halter trained so every morning they are led from the pens about 100 metres up to the main gate and then back into their paddock. Not in the evenings though - gates open and they dash for home. They learn so quickly. One of our KZN members Shelly McKerrow has just sent me a video of herself leading four eight-month old crias across her lawn - a perfect four-in-hand.

My current task - I've taken on the repair of what was obviously once a gent's very handsome Norwegian jersey (had to get my adjectives in the right order there!) It is almost more hole than jersey but it's an old friend to its owner. People do this - they see me standing at my stall at Greyton market amongst a sea of knitwear and think, "ah she must know how to do it ..." Anyway I said I would. There is hardly anything at the elbows, just air so I must knit patches to sew on, and it looks as though supermoths have been at the lower sleeves and around the hem. It has a design on it too so I shall have to box clever. Hmm.

A VACANCY EXISTS ... WE ARE LOOKING FOR A REGIONAL REP ...

We are very sad that Verena Hinsch of Mukuti Stud has resigned her position as SAABS' regional rep for the Western Cape. Verena thank you for your support over the past few years and particularly for the research you undertook this year, going from breeder to breeder collecting valuable information, and taking remedial action where it was needed. Verena will continue as an active and supportive SAABS member.



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Our prospective candidate should be prepared to report to Di and Alison from time to time and keep an ear to the ground on all matters alpaca. Once a year regional reps are asked to prepare a short report for the AGM.

So - not that arduous, but necessary. Anyone prepared to help?

SAABS REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

♣ Kwa Zulu Natal:	Wendy Channing	wendy@endeavouralpacas.com
♣ Free State:	Corlia Boshoff	corlia@plettafrica.co.za
♣ Gauteng:	Tawheda Schuitema	schuitema.taw@gmail.com
♣ Western Cape:	Position vacant as at September 2024	

SUMMING IT UP

Filling out forms is an odious job, none of us likes it but to a conference organiser the evaluation form is a reflection on how good or bad the planning was, whether we structured the event correctly and covered the most important topics, whether delegates were happy and, most importantly, where we can improve in future. So to those who did complete your seminar form, thank you.



Of the forms returned 100 per cent of delegates rated the overall assessment very good or good (options being very good / good / fair / disappointing. Of that 100 per cent 95.4% voted it very good. Three cheers!

As long as we keep organising educational events for our breeders we will always find some of the information is already known to us and hopefully there will always be delegates able to learn something new. We are wise in hindsight and perhaps we might change our advertising next time so that we reach more newbies - those who came to research and decide whether breeding alpacas really is what they want to pursue. Or do we look to attract a more advanced level for seasoned breeders and vets? What is good is that SAABS is listed as an SA Veterinary Council CPD provider and that gives us a certain amount of 'cred'.

I found it great (quite amusing too ...) to see really established and experienced vets (particularly the Gauteng ones) poring over fleeces as well as Helen's little bags of fibre samples and getting the message that THIS is what breeding these wonderful animals is all about!

Below are some of highlights from delegates' evaluation forms:

- *There was a lot of useful info (practical and theoretical) in the presentation;*
- *Helen is an amazing person and passionate breeder. Seminar was good for both novice and experienced breeders as well as vets;*
- *Well presented, knowledgeable. Husbandry and biosecurity advice was excellent, thanks;*
 - *Absolutely brilliant!*
 - *Enjoyed all and learned so much;*
 - *Excellently organised and very interesting speaker;*
 - *Learned a lot. Lots of practical information and tips;*
- *Structured, detailed presentations, explanations easy to understand. Thank you for printed and presentation materials as it is a lot of info;*
 - *Great event. I learned a lot;*
- *Loved meeting all the breeders, vets and other students. Also great to meet people in the industry and knowing there is a big support system and knowledge mine;*
 - *Catering, facilities and refreshments were top notch!*

TIPS FOR NEW OWNERS - OUR NEW COLUMN ...

Last month as our opening gambit we covered toenail trimming and vaccinations including the all important Vitamin D. This month Wendy Channing of Endeavour Alpacas offers this advice ...

HANDLING YOUR ALPACA

Often fondly referred to as “long necked sheep” because of their fleece and long necks, the alpaca neck is probably the most vulnerable and weakest spot on the entire body. Have you ever tried herding alpacas by waving your arms and shouting? You will agree that these extremes never work.

1. In order to safely catch an alpaca, best practise is to herd the animals into a smaller catchment area or passage.

The safest and best practise is to do this at a slow mindful walking pace with helpers covering either end of you with arms outstretched;

The minute you start hitting, shouting, throwing things around, your animals will panic, charge all over the place, get stressed out and inevitably never trust you again;

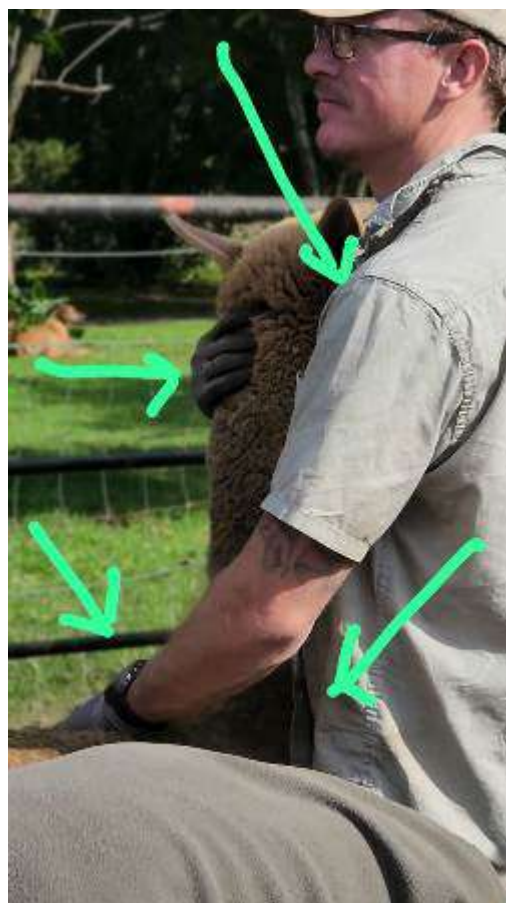
2. You would then need to single out the alpaca needing attention, once they are all in a secure pen, by letting them out slowly one by one, until there are a few left (so that the animal you are going to work on doesn't panic) If the remaining animals are going to compromise your safety, then a gate between them should work.... Not a solid gate so they can't see each other;

3. Restrain the animal safely and in such a way that the handler/s are also safe by walking the animal to a corner and handler and assistant committing at the same time to contain the animal. This doesn't mean allowing it to run past you so that you can rugby tackle the animal around the neck – you will break or dislocate the vertebrae;

4. Put your initial grasp low down toward the chest area around the neck, put one of your legs, up against the chest to prevent forward motion, and secure the head with your free arm around the head and against your chest. Keep body contact throughout so that you can feel any fight or flight signs;

5. It is a good idea to have them up against a railing or wall especially if they are difficult;

6. When you need to change sides, you keep your lower body and arms in position and move YOUR upper body backwards and around to the other side and then you will swop your arm position and leg if necessary;



7. Should the animal fight to the point where you cannot hold him safely, rather let go and try again.... hanging from the animal's neck while it's at full gallop across the enclosure is dangerous to you both. Too many animals have had their necks broken or dislocated during rough handling during shearing or herd maintenance;
8. They are extremely clever and remember everything... they know who is the weakest link, they know which corner or fence is compromised and not strong, they remember who has hurt and panicked them, and use it to their advantage;
9. Always keep the animal balanced and secure, no need to grasp and hold so tight that no one is breathing, this triggers fight or flight mode. Or pull or push so hard that the animal falls over. And, no, you cannot have a person each side doing toenails simultaneously... they need at least 3 legs to stand;
10. Breathe, they feel your anxiety, so breathe, once you have your body, arms and hands in position you will be able to release tension. Do not let go;
11. NEVER EVER LIE OVER AN ALPACAS BACK ... especially when they're pregnant. Males cover a female that way, and males fight with other males by jumping onto them so you are going to trigger danger responses;
12. Don't stand directly behind an alpaca with your face low down. Stand to the side toward the back and work;
13. When you have completed what you need to do, it's best to release the animal together, and only when it's calm. You don't want an animal to learn to fight to get let go ... you reward his good behaviour by gently letting go while he is still, and in a standing/or kush position.



*A happy sale for
Helderstroom
Alpacas this week of
this bullion rose
alpaca cardigan.
Despite the fact we
are supposed to be
going into spring our
jersey sales are good
right now.
Wonderful Maree
who made this has
been knitting for us
since 2009!
Hand spun, hand
knit, hand
embroidered -
nothing like it!*



WHY DO THEY NEED SO MUCH FIBRE?

This question cropped up a few years ago - around 2017 I believe, and again at our AGM last month. Fibre testing options in South Africa are either BKB or the SA Wool Testing Bureau, both in Port Elizabeth. The year the Wool Testing Bureau decided they needed a minimum of 20 grams in a testing sample, we were not advised and I was pretty hacked off that more than half my samples came back untested. So since then we make sure to send the requisite weight but it still begs the question (to my cynical self ...) how many beanies have been made from my fibre ...!

I wrote to the WTB and in August 2017 we published their reply in the newsletter. Here is a rerun of that article:-

A MEMBER'S QUERY

Alison Notley

One of the items for discussion at the AGM Open Forum was why is as much as 20 grams of fibre required for a micron testing and analysis. Having been caught out by this ourselves a couple of years ago when only about a third of our fibre was analysed I, too, was interested to know the reason why. So I wrote to the Wool Testing Bureau and received this comprehensive reply. Rather than try to précis it I have quoted verbatim Johan Barkhuizen's reply:-

Some background:

Animal (protein) fibre mean diameter can be measured (length across the fibre) using mainly four different technologies. They are also used to some extent with man-made and cellulose/plant (cotton, etc.) fibre:



Airflow and Microscope Projection technologies are no longer used commercially, leaving OFDA (Optical Fibre Diameter Analyser) and Laserscan.

OFDA is used by the broker companies (mentioned in your email to us) as part of their farm/advice services to the grower. It operates by using a staple (finger thick samples) and scanning with an optical microscope attached to a camera along the staple. This determines the length of the diameter of the fibre, usually up and down the staple a few times, and in greasy state.

WTBSA also uses this technology (with different model instruments) but set up to apply it in accordance with two international standards. In the absence of methods developed for Alpaca, the wool methods are just as suitable, as the fibre is very similar.

We use, however, Laserscan measurements as this is the industry standard. There are several advantages with this technology e.g. rapid measurements, with no operator influence etc.



We use the following standards for **alpaca/fleece measurements:-**

1. AS/NZS 4492.2:2000 Australian/New Zealand Standard

Wool—Fleece testing and measurement

Method 2: Determination of washing yield and clean fleece weight



It would be impossible to calculate a Yield (mass of sample before washing, relative to the clean sample after washing) with the small sample in the broker's case.

For micron testing:

AS/NZS 4492.4:2000 Australian/New Zealand Standard

Wool—Fleece testing and measurement

Method 4: Measurement of mean fibre diameter and determination of fibre diameter distribution using the SIROLAN-LASERSCAN measuring system

This has been the standard for Micron testing for the last 10+ years. The Laserscan measures snippets (cut fibres with a length (along the fibre) of approx 2 mm) which passes while dispersed in liquid, through a optical cell with an Optical Lazer for determining the diameter of each fibre.

This differs from the OFDA method:

1. No fibre is measured twice, snippets pass through the cell and they are discarded.
2. Each individual fibre has a measurement accurate to 0.1 micron (100 nanometer - this is in the realm of light sub-atoms)
3. A great deal more fibres are analysed very rapidly (4000 fibres in total minimum with 12 000 maximum).
4. In cases where there is large variation in diameter, more measurements are undertaken to establish a more precise mean.



For this to work the industry provides a bigger sample which is washed, from the 20g we prepared (see photos, for example only 10-15 grams remains hereafter as the grease, soils and moisture is removed).

This leaves a cleaned sample which is standardised to 20 degrees C and 65 Moisture over 8 hours. This requirement necessitates controlled laboratory atmospheres. The reasoning: the more moisture in the surrounding air, the more the fibre swells up and this affects measurements. An example of frizzy hair on a rainy day comes to mind.

This sample is minicored (compressed in a cylinder shape and sharpened tubes punctures/cuts through the fibres, and ejects the contents of the coring tube into the carrier fluid for measuring by the lazer optical bench.

This is an internationally standardized method for sample preparation and very much superior to the method employed by the broker companies as it samples randomly, and uses cleaned and conditioned samples in a standard testing environment unaffected by external influences.

The animal husbandry institutions, such as Studbook SA, have to comply with international accreditation regulations to be able to supply measurements and animal statistics on par with these that are used abroad. I know that they have been working towards getting this in place for Alpaca also, as Herman made me fill the testing requirement application for them.

In the wool industry, there are similar requirements, and non-compliance with regards to measurements will result in non-acceptance by stud/auctions (especially local stud auctions) or genealogy record keeping etc. This is understandable as these animals (rams) trade up to half a million rands. This is in contrast to the R5 - R15 required for measurement.

In short, the micron and/or yield result obtained otherwise is not accurate enough and will not be trusted. We submit participating growers' results on their behalf to, for example, SA Studbook for processing. Please see:

<http://www.sastudbook.co.za/dc42/sa-stud-book/breeders'-societies/other-species/other-breeders'-societies.html> for more information.

Also our website is located at <http://www.wtbsa.co.za> under the fleece section. I realise that there is no Alpaca information there. If you wish us to add something on your behalf please let me know.

For your members' benefit I thought to include some microscope photos/slides to have a closer look at the fibre, with Llama on the first page and some other exotic fibres like silk/insect. This is unique to species and even alpacas so this might give your members an idea of the structure with which we clothe ourselves, and the Wool Testing Bureau measures to a 10th of a millionth of a meter.

The attached photos also includes some lab photos and the laserscan instruments. As WTB is a not-for profit service based bureau, I should like to extend a warm invitation to contact me for arranging a tour, should you find yourselves in the Eastern Cape, Port Elizabeth.

Kind regards
Johan

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HELDERSTROOM IN WINTER ...

This is Willowbrook Gatsby. Bred by Lorna Ramsden of Willowbrook Alpacas in Noordhoek, Gatsby came to us last year at foot with his gorgeous dam Willowbrook Galinda.

The ominous shadow on his side is that of his mate Decker, part of a group of male alpacas born in March-April 2023 and now being 'uncles' to this year's small group of weaned boys.

We're looking forward to shearing Gatsby again soon whose fibre is fine with lovely big round crimp curves.

Chat again next month - keep well everyone!