



Central Region Newsletter

February/March 2022

Your Central Region Newsletter From The Alpaca Association New Zealand



**Cria 'Sooty' -
Stephen Kellam**

I can't believe it's March already – Good GRIEF!! This edition of the newsletter sees some great informative articles – so thank you to those that have contributed. We have a couple of articles from the archives (previous AANZ Magazines) – why reinvent the wheel. Peter Aitken our local vet from Totally Vets has also agreed to provide us with future articles. He is currently writing a couple on managing internal and external parasites. If you have any topics you would like him to cover off let me know.

For our Central Region AANZ members our AGM will be held mid May. Notice will be formally sent out over the next few weeks. If you would like to become a member of the Committee the nomination form will be attached to the notice. It would be great to have a few of you on board so please consider it, or give me a call if you want to understand what's involved.

Once things settle down a bit re Covid we hope to run a few hands on workshops or just general get-togethers. Hopefully we will be able to do this in the not too distant future.

It's starting to cool off a bit – fingers crossed we will get a bit of rain followed by some sunshine before winter kicks in to give the grass a boost. Stay safe and enjoy the simple things in life – sitting in the paddock with the alpacas and a glass of wine works a treat for me!

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Alpaca Castration

From the Archives: Originally published in AANZ Summer Magazine 2009

Author: Peter Aitken, BVSc, Totally Vets Palmerston North

Castration is a common practice in machos not required for breeding purposes. It is a procedure that can be done from 8 months of age onwards, but many owners prefer to wait until after skeletal height maturity has been reached (12-18 months). Problems associated with early castration that have been observed in studies undertaken in North America involve the failure of long bone growth plate closure resulting in elongated limbs; in particular in llamas, lateral patellar luxation and early onset of degenerative osteoarthritis of the stifle joints have been seen due to the development of a tall straight legged stature.



Should castration be done prior to 12 months of age? The only limiting factor is that both testicles are present in the scrotum. If we are worried about the appearance of the alpaca being more slight of build, i.e. more effeminate than an entire male; as we are castrating them due to the fact we do not wish them to breed for other reasons, should we be concerned with such mild aesthetics? Ultimately that decision is one best left to the owner!

Castration can be safely performed under local anaesthesia and suitable restraint. Suitable restraint I find is to have one person holding the head of the animal and a second person holding the tail for me. Chukkering can also be used if required. However, general anaesthesia is not required although some larger or more aggressive individuals may require some sedation.

The Process

Following suitable preparation of the perineum using surgical scrub techniques, local anaesthetic is infused in a line of each testis (the volume will depend on the size and age of the animal). In a full grown male approximately 4-5ml is infused under the skin over each testis and a further 1ml is injected into the body of each testis.

The skin is incised over the testis and through the overlying fat pad. The testicle, epididymis and ductus deferens are then exteriorised within the common tunic (closed technique) and the surrounding fat and fascia separated away. The ductus and other vessels are then clamped and ligated before cutting. This procedure is then repeated for the other testicle.

Following removal of both testicles, the incisions are stripped of any fat or tissue that may be hanging out and are left open to heal by secondary intention. Providing strict asepsis has been observed, antibiotics are not indicated. Minimal bleeding should occur post-operatively. Complications that can arise include bleeding, swelling and infection. They are very uncommon but should be attended to promptly should they occur.

By using the above technique is it possible to make castrations a quick and relatively stress free event for the animals whilst also placing both animals and handlers at minimal risk. There will be some occasions when general anaesthesia may be required but this should only occur when adequate help is not available to restrain the animal. If you can organise to have two people present when your vet attends to undertake castrations it should help to speed up the process and remove the need for general anaesthesia.

Alpaca Castration continued...

It has been suggested that the use of rubber rings to castrate alpacas is an option when considering castration. I would strongly advise against this as I have had the unfortunate experience of having to tidy up situations where the use of rings has gone wrong! If applied correctly and by an experienced operator they can be used to good effect but these occasions are few and far between. I was also asked recently if it was possible for owners to obtain local anaesthetic and castrate the animals themselves. The answer to this is 'no"! Castration using local anaesthetic and a scalpel and where an incision is made is classed as an operation on an animal and as such is only permitted under our animal welfare act to be undertaken by veterinarians.

My goal in describing the above technique to you is to hopefully make you aware, as owners, that there is a quick and simple way for vets to do this procedure that is safe for both animal owner. If either you or your vet would like to contact me to discuss please do.



Ear Tags - Saving you money and anguish

Author: Cheryl Hunter

Why do we need to tag our alpacas?

One of the main reasons is traceability of an animal. A reputable breeder wants to be able to identify and know the breeding of a male or female, the age of the animal, color, traits which can be looked up on the AANZ Registry if the ear tag number is known.

If you are buying an alpaca, depending on what you are buying the alpaca for- breeding, companion animals to have in a paddock. It pays to get an animal with an ear tag so you can look up the age of the animal, color, breeding, you will then know it is the animal the seller says it is.

If the details on the registry say it is 14 years old and you have been told it is 5 years old, the color of the animal is white and, on the registry, it is medium fawn then you know that you are not being sold the correct animal. Most people do want a young animal that will be around for years, ear tags that can be looked up online gives you that added security. It also gives you the alpacas breeding history if you are interested in the breeding side.

Many people don't care enough about the animals that they are selling and there are plenty of buyers who don't care enough about the alpacas they are buying. Always buy from reputable breeders, ones who will follow up or are available to be called on by a concerned buyer who has a problem.

Never buy an alpaca that is less than 6 months old as they should still be on their dam! Unless the dam and cria are being sold as a package, this is the **ONLY** time a cria can be sold and it **MUST** be with its dam.

Ear tags are not expensive, the brass tags are available only through the AANZ store at a cost of \$ 13.80 per 5 tags. That is a cost of \$ 2.76 per alpaca plus registering a male is only \$5 and a female is \$26. It costs more to register a female as most often a female will be kept for breeding from. Whereas a male needs to be of a certain quality to be breed from and only a few meet the criteria.

Ear tags are also a requirement for export, no tag no export.



From the Archives: Originally published in AANZ Magazine August 2018

Author – Sarah Donaldson and Farmstrong

Preamble – Ros Scott

The article was published a couple of years ago and everything covered in it still rings true today. My take on our “current” situation is that I feel frustrated as hell for a whole bunch of reasons...Covid has definitely affected my business, but more importantly I miss being able to easily hang out with fellow alpaca breeders – whether that be at a show or at a farm sharing knowledge, experiences and having a few laughs. Our current environment has affected each and every one of us in a different way. If you are reading this article I would assume you have alpacas – so we are connected in that way....we need to stay connected, enjoy our alpacas and reach out and be kind to each other.

Watch out for the signs of unhealthy stress

One of the biggest signs of stress is irritability; people lose their tolerance and little things start to bug them a lot more. Another sign is when our thinking becomes jumbled and intrusive, with our thoughts jumping from one topic to another. Often, we repetitively think about outstanding tasks or concerns e.g. ‘How am I going to get that done.’ That intrusive kind of thinking can be draining. On the physical side of things, it often means we’re not sleeping well or waking up during the night thinking about what we’ve got to do the next day.

Make a plan

If you’ve got a bit on your plate or have a busy time coming up, it’s about being proactive and coming up with an action plan. Instead of trying to do everything, ask yourself: what are the one or two top things you need to work on right now? Is it spraying for facial eczema, buying feed in, renovating your pastures – what’s going to make the biggest difference? Focus on the top two things and park everything else. Once you are feeling back in charge your stress levels will go down.

Look after yourself

When people are under pressure the things that go out the window are often the things that keep us well. Things like exercise/sport, leisure activities, sleep, healthy eating, taking breaks, socialising with others and contributing to the community.

These are the things that build resilience and help us cope with pressure. If you want to stay on top of your game, you’ve got to be proactive about your health. If there is a situation where you feel really wound up, take yourself off for a quick break and do something distracting – this reduces the chance that you will ‘lose your cool’ at someone or something.



Build in recovery time - If you want to stay productive and sustainable as a person on your farm, you've got to have breaks and inject recovery periods. Think of the All Blacks in the World Cup, and how they built up to compete each week. They wouldn't go out and play another game two days later. Within each week, tournament or World Cup they built in recovery periods to their schedule. Its not different with farming. Getting off the farm – whether its bush walking, a catch up with friends, a comedy show, or trying a new restaurant – it gives you respite and recharges your body.

Reduce your arousal level - When your body is under threat from being too busy or mentally pressured, it releases stress hormones that increase your arousal level, peppering you up and making it hard to relax or sleep well at night. To bring this arousal down again, try exercising (in the day), deep abdominal breathing and other relaxation techniques.

Use helpful thinking - Helpful thinking is about catching negative thoughts and then thinking about the situation in a more helpful way. An example of helpful thinking would be 'Yes, it's a tough year with drought, but the long-range forecast is more promising and every farmer in this area has been through this before and got through ok. We've just got to tighten the reins and learn what we can for next time.' Helpful thinking gives you better balance and aids with containing distress.

Talk to others, stay connected - The times when you are struggling to cope with stress are when it's good to talk to others about it. Surround yourself with people who are upbeat, pragmatic and able to give you a different perspective. That can change the way you look at a situation. Connections with family and friends, professionally and in your community, are a big part of staying well. Everybody needs to be able to call on extra resources from time to time.

Communicate - Managing stress if you're in a team or couple is about talking through issues together, formulating a plan and sharing the load to get things back on track. It's all about awareness, realising when you or your partner is under pressure and coming up with a plan. Make breaks and time off farm part of your business plan. Don't think of recovery time as a luxury, think of it from a business perspective.

Farmstrong is an initiative designed to give farmers the skills and resources to live well, farm well and get the most out of life. Website: farmstrong.co.nz



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The Warning Signs of Unhealthy Stress

Your Body

- ☐ Breathing problems
- ☐ Chest tightness
- ☐ Upset stomach e.g. nausea, diarrhoea, constipation
- ☐ Tension, aches and pains
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Feeling 'wired' – unable to relax
- ☐ Lower immunity, inclined to catch any little bug going around and take longer to recover
- ☐ Altered sex drive (reduced) or alternatively, increased need for sex as a release



Your Mind

- ☐ Thinking feels sped up and thought are intrusive.
- ☐ Difficulty making decisions
- ☐ Forgetfulness
- ☐ Poor concentration
- ☐ Poor problem solving
- ☐ Easily distracted



Your Emotions

- ☐ Worrying excessively (similar to anxiety)
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed, stuck or trapped
- ☐ 'Short fuse' – sudden bursts of anger and irritability often at small issues
- ☐ Tearfulness
- ☐ Feeling down
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Loss of motivation and enjoyment



Check to see if these signs sound like you.

Your Actions & Behaviour

- ☐ Sleeping problems e.g. can't get to sleep or wake up thinking about farm tasks, or sleeping too much and can't get out of bed
- ☐ Poor eating
- ☐ May become withdrawn – failing to share daily goals with partner and staff, shutting off from community events and socialisation
- ☐ Alcohol, tobacco and caffeine use may increase
- ☐ Become reactive rather than proactive
- ☐ Avoiding situations or issues e.g. not returning phone calls or opening invoices
- ☐ Delaying demanding tasks e.g. tagging sheep



Sarah Donaldson,
Clinical Psychologist

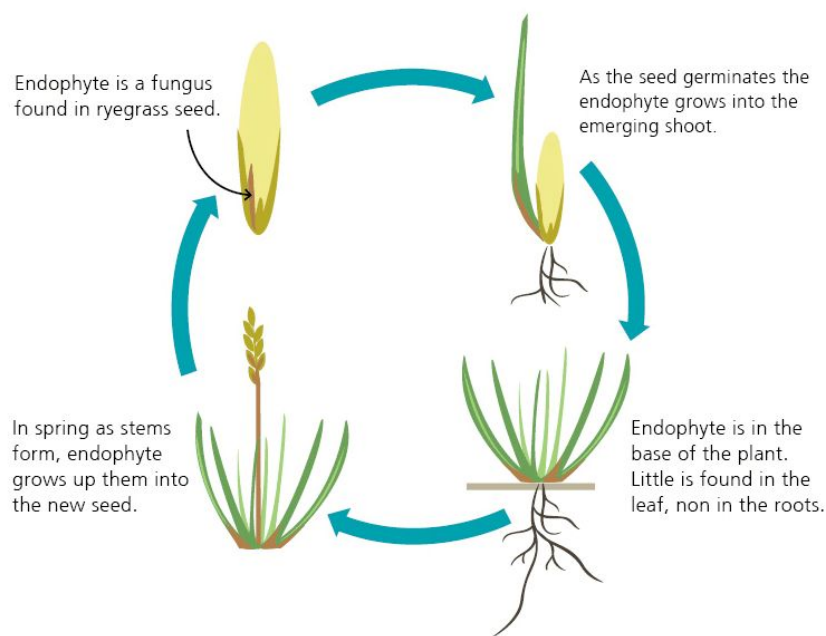
Ryegrass Staggers

Reprinted from Southern Rangitikei Vet Services Newsletter January 2022

Ryegrass staggers is a neurological disease affecting cattle, sheep, horses, deer, alpacas and llamas. It is caused by a fungal toxin produced by endophytes in perennial ryegrass pastures. Perennial ryegrass has been developed to contain endophytes to protect itself against insects and pests. Unfortunately, these endophytes can produce fungal toxins which can cause animal health issues such as ryegrass staggers. In warm, humid conditions like we have had lately, fungal toxins can build up to high levels quickly.

Ryegrass staggers is usually seen in summer and autumn, when grass gets away and goes to seed, or is grazed down lower in drought conditions. Outbreaks in groups of animals vary from individual affected animals, to the majority of the group in some cases.

Affected animals develop head tremors, twitching, jerky and stiff movements, and incoordination. Symptoms are exacerbated with noise, exercise or fright. Animals can collapse when pushed, with jerky/twitching leg and eye movements, but if left quietly will recover in time and get up again. Heat stress makes symptoms worse.



The fungal toxin is concentrated down in the base of the grass plant, and also concentrates in the top when the grass is flowering/going to seed. Avoiding overgrazing low down, and avoiding grazing when grass is flowering and going to seed, helps reduce toxin exposure. Ideal grazing management should limit grass going to seed, as well as avoiding grazing too low.

Once animals are affected, the main management involves reducing toxin ingestion, removing them toxic pastures, increasing supplementary/alternative feed (hay/silage), or moving onto safe pasture if available. Avoid yarding and unnecessary movement if possible, but always move to a “safe” paddock away from hazards such as unfenced cliffs or waterways. Death is uncommon with Ryegrass staggers and is usually the result of misadventure rather than the toxin itself. Recovery usually occurs in 1-2 weeks if no further toxin ingestion occurs though some tremors can become permanent, especially in Camelids. Animals vary in their susceptibility, and once they have been affected, they are more likely to develop ryegrass staggers in the future when conditions are right.

Mycotoxin binders such as Mycosorb can be added to feed to aid in the prevention of staggers along with other mycotoxin issues.

However mycotoxin binders are not a curative treatment, and are less effective if given once signs are already present. Ryegrass pastures that are high risk can be managed by careful grazing management, or the pasture composition can be changed over time by encouraging growth of other grass species, legumes, or sowing of different ryegrass seed with a different endophyte if re-grassing is an option.

There are a few other more serious neurological conditions that can look similar to Ryegrass staggers, so it is always advised that you ring and have a chat to your vet if you suspect your animals might be suffering from staggers.

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