

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ALPACA BREEDERS' SOCIETY

August 2024

Volume 11, Issue 6



FIRST THE AGM ...



... and straight off Etihad Airways from London Heathrow via Abu Dhabi ... our guest speaker Helen Macdonald arrived at OT Airport on Friday 2nd August. Posing with Helen here is one of Christie's labradoodles, Raymond, not forgetting of course, Pepper standing rearguard.

Huge thanks to SAABS member Christie Bosman and husband Ruan for their wonderful hospitality at their extensive Brakpan Garden Nursery. Christie pushed the boat out for us, showed us right round the nursery, showed us the section where her extensive alpaca art collection is displayed and sent us all away with one of her own ceramic alpaca mugs. I got Frikkie!

We weren't a quorum but the Constitution directed the protocol and a really convivial time was had by all.

It was interesting to hear from Helen that the British Alpaca Society goes through many of the same problems as we do. Good to know - and reassuring - that our problems are not unique. And hearing a UK perspective on matters alpaca was enlightening too.

Needless to say AGM minutes may be a wee while in coming as we went straight from the Saturday AGM into the Sunday and Monday Understanding Alpacas Seminar and put Di's purpose-built *alpaca visitors' centre* to the test. Please bear with us.

It is a pity our AGMs are not better attended but we do understand that travel is difficult for so many. We try to be fair to all members by alternating between provinces.

The newsletter is not the forum for the nuts and bolts of the AGM so here follows a bit of a pictorial ...



Someone eyeing up the grub ...



One of Christie's alpaca paintings - a portrait of Teddy



Christie's candles, each with an alpaca-themed label and beautifully scented.

Present at our AGM were Christie Bosman, Wendy Channing, Zani Gouws, Given Gumbi, Di Kruger, Alison Notley, Deanne Roberts, Tawheda Schuitema, Patrick Sithole, by special invitation Annemie Niemann from the University of the North West who gave a most interesting after lunch talk on her alpaca fibre research, and our special guest Helen Macdonald. And after several years of absence it was wonderful to welcome Zani Gouws back into the fold.





Di receives her long service and good conduct 'medal' after 21 years (or is it more?) as SAABS's secretary. Di we are forever grateful to you.

After the meeting ended Di, Helen and I returned to Drumblade where Di quickly opened up the Centre and we set about testing slides, focusing the projector, straightening chairs, laying out fleeces, fibre samples and all the things one does before a conference.

Di, thank you for your wonderful hospitality over four really fun days.

The morning after the seminar - and I'll get on to that on the next page - the Tuesday morning, the three of us were up at 0330 hours to catch the 6 o'clock plane to Cape Town. How we did it I'm not sure. Johan nobly drove us to the airport in the dark and a few strong coffees later we were airborne to the Cape.

If my memory is correct our guest speaker took these pics of Di. Thank you Helen ...





GETTING UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH THE ALPACAS OVER LUNCH TIME

... THEN ON TO OUR GAUTENG UNDERSTANDING ALPACAS SEMINAR ...

We kicked off our Gauteng Seminar with a welcome to our guest speaker Helen, veterinarian delegates, SAABS members and new friends. Both Di's Visitors' Centre and our own venue could take around 30 people comfortably and we were well subscribed both up the top end and in the Western Cape.



Day one covered essentials for alpaca farming; biosecurity (which is one of Helen's hot topics), nutrition, alpaca husbandry, endoparasites (internal) and ectoparasites (external); first aid for the poorly alpaca and after tea in the afternoon Helen told us a bit about bovine TB and the abominable Geronimo story.



Here Helen chats to Tshidi Mtshali. Tshidi was one of the first delegates to register for Gauteng and was there to do her homework prior to purchasing her first animals.

This is Helen's Rebel's fleece, pics left and right. 17 micron, third fleece and a beautiful mixture of colours, with density like you can't believe!



Zani Gouws, Marcelle and Deanne Roberts and Tawheda Schuitema stand behind Rebel's fleece. This is a complete fleece, and one of several which Helen brought from her own alpacas. Rebel, whose amazingly dense fleece could well be described as true capuchino colour is the son of a black sire and his dam the same colour as he is. His DNA is 'eaa' with classic grey pattern so although he cannot express black himself he can pass on black base colour and or grey pattern. Because of his exceptional fibre structure Helen will breed him over some of her black females to improve their fibre characteristics.

Helen went on to cover colour genetics on day two - breeding for specific colours, dominant and recessive genes, DNA testing - which for anyone interested - can be done from here using overseas labs, base colours and patterns.

Fibre samples (on the right) for us to assess. Hmm thinking of becoming a fibre judge? This wasn't as easy as it looked. At home we know our own animals. We know who's young, who's old, who has wire wool for fibre and who has the luxury stuff. Bit of a 'blind tasting' here! Can't say I found this easy at all!



So we opened the bags, matched the name on the bag with the alpaca's name on our score sheet and assessed under headings *handle (softness); fineness; character (crimp/lock); uniformity of staple; uniformity of colour; guard hair; and length*. Scoring 1 = not very nice; 2 = less than average; 3 = average / usable; 4 = nice / would like and 5 = fabulous / want, we filled out our sheets and compared notes.



And here is Johan with his devoted friend Chidi. Johan was not only on tea and coffee duty with Di's wonderful help Melissa, at the Alpaca Visitors' Centre but also on "genny" standby, and took Helen, Di and me to the airport on Tuesday morning at 4 in the morning. Chidi and her seven other canine friends kept us entertained.

AND FINALLY TO A VERY WET AND BLUSTERY HELDERSTROOM



Slides up front, and Sandy and James Brodie from the Eastern Cape absorb the proceedings.



FIBRE, FLEECE SKIRTING AND FIBRE EVALUATION



At both seminars it was good to see even the vets mucking in and assessing fleece. Isn't this, after all, what our ultimate goal should be with these animals, producing better and better fleece from them? And this is all part and parcel of good nutrition?

I have to say the vets in Gauteng were a bit more hands-on fleece-wise than the Western Cape ones. Feedback has been so so encouraging. The vets certainly weren't used to handling fibre at all and they loved it!



Last of all, and far from the green fields of Gloucestershire, we took Helen for a quick game trip to Sanbona Reserve in the Klein Karoo where she was able to see the big five including two lionesses close up on a kill, elephants, and a magnificent sighting of a cheetah.



AND BACK HOME, HELEN WRITES FROM SHEPHERD'S CLOSE FARM

Safely back home after a short stop over in Abu Dhabi, I am reflecting on a fabulous trip to South Africa. After months of planning the SAABS alpaca project for this year is over. It was a great privilege to visit farms near both Johannesburg and Cape Town. Everyone made me feel very welcome.

It was fantastic to meet so many enthusiastic people all passionate about and fascinated by alpacas. Equally pleasing was the range of high quality alpaca products being produced.

I thoroughly enjoyed working with Alison and Di, two very organised people, and following their course outline, loved putting the presentations together over several weeks. It was very rewarding to see the seminars so well received and we hope that there was some useful information in them for everyone.

Lastly thank you, everyone, for the lovely Bao Bag presented to me. I absolutely love it!

Wishing you all the best on your alpaca journeys ...

xxx Helen"



A HAPPY TALE FROM MUKUTI STUD IN MONTAGU Jenny Turck writes ...

Just too late for the July newsletter, sorry, but amongst the heartache of losing our dear Goofy Sebastian, reason unknown as we did not do an autopsy but our vet suspects a bite from scorpion or snake as he had an abscess on his mouth that had developed within a few days of his last overall body check, there is also a short feel-good story to share.

Backtracking a few months ago we decided to put our three young males with our small flock of 12 sheep to get them used to sheep and to “train” as herd guards, away from the ladies and bullying big boys .

This worked so well that if we took them away from the sheep they would refuse to eat their hay when they were brought in to their overnight shelter and stare for ages towards where the sheep are housed, so needless to say they are now permanently part of the flock.

Our sheep started their main lambing season on the 1st of July and every new lamb that appears is sniffed and studied by the young alpacas with huge interest but oh so gently you cannot believe.

With some of their little flock





Yesterday four lambs were lying in a little group in the middle of the paddock and not a mommy sheep in sight but unbelievably surrounded by the “Three Musketeers” grazing contentedly near them.

One of the lambs got up and started bleating and within minutes all four moms appeared and started feeding them. Only then did the three alpacas move further away. How precious is that? They take their responsibilities as herd guards very seriously especially with the babies.

Unfortunately I did not have my phone near me to capture this precious moment but the attached photos show them on high alert when visitors arrive with the dogs and with some of their flock.

The Three Musketeers - on high Alert – visitors and dogs approaching

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We hope those of you who attended our seminars enjoyed yourselves and learned a lot. Di and I were corresponding with Helen since February and we certainly learned masses.

Helen we hope we will see you in South African again one day and, on behalf of everyone thank you from the bottom of our hearts for taking time out of your schedule to come here. Most of all, now you are home, with still more legal battles ahead, may there ultimately be Justice for Geronimo.



The three of us had really dotted the i's and crossed the t's when it came to getting the necessary permit for Helen to bring in alpaca fleeces and fibre samples from the UK. All the permits needed to be signed, countersigned and then an export permit issued and stamped by the UK's DEFRA, then Helen's own UK vet had to certify that the fleeces had been sealed and maintained at a temperature under 18°C for 30 days (i.e. taking up space in Helen's deepfreeze). Anticipating a bit of uphill at Oliver Tambo Airport Helen came in armed with permits for permits, a to whom it may concern letter signed by me asking the authorities to assist with and expedite Helen's entry in every way they could. Did Customs even look at any of this? Helen sailed through Customs and Immigration to be met by an excited Di shortly after 9 am on the 2nd of August.

It has been mooted that we set up a 'Tips for new Owners' column, so let's see how we can do this. Probably via the newsletter will ensure it is available to new SAABS breeders. And the first request came to me from our new Zimbabwe members, so I have opened a column on the following page so please everyone send in your contributions. Another request, actually on one of the seminar evaluation sheets - and this came from the wife of a vet - was "handling the alpaca's long neck". Good point. Would someone care to address the long neck for our September newsletter?

SAABS REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|--|
| ♣ Kwa Zulu Natal: | Wendy Channing | wendy@endeavouralpaca.com |
| ♣ Free State: | Corlia Boshoff | corlia@plettafrica.co.za |
| ♣ Gauteng: | Tawheda Schuitema | schuitema.taw@gmail.com |
| ♣ Western Cape: | | |

**A SCARE AT ENDEAVOUR ALPACAS,
Curry's Post, Midlands, KZN
by Wendy Channing**

Monday, 12 August, I had dropped a load of garden clippings in the girls paddocks (we always add our garden refuse to our paddocks for mulching or composting) which immediately attracted our females. I am always thorough in checking that rubbish isn't dumped or in the bags. That evening five females didn't eat. One looked like she was burning. I immediately went up to sift through what had been dumped but other than a couple of small broken plastic planter pieces I didn't see anything concerning. I checked on them through the night. Next morning just the one female (Cormos) was still ADR, and not eating. I watched her throughout the day and didn't notice her drink or eat other than half hearted nibbles at some dry leaves. Tuesday evening she didn't eat again and went straight to lie down. Two other girls also didn't eat and the one was "burbing" By this time I was getting very concerned and checked the entire paddock in a grid pattern to make sure I didn't miss anything... absolutely nothing raised concern. That evening I got up and checked every two hours.

Early Wednesday morning she was the only one still not eating. I administered Kyrophos and inflacam as she was grinding her teeth. Then I called Veon.

After emergencies he managed to arrive before dark. Checked out one female that was foamy and my ADR one. Other than having lost quite a bit of weight, temperature and famacha satisfactory, no obvious diagnosis was made. We tubed her with activated charcoal, liquid paraffin, a bunch of vitamins and minerals and a long acting antibiotic and Rumen inj.

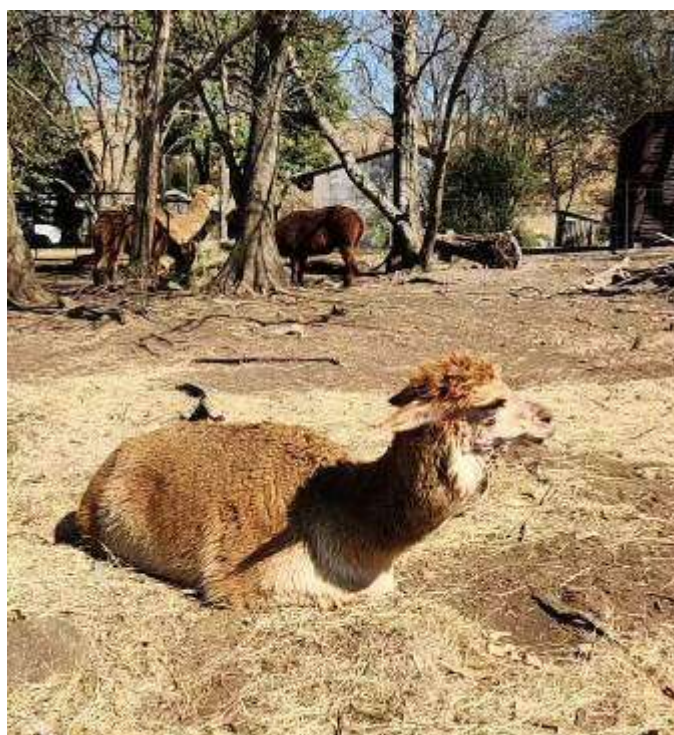
My second girl fought us all the way and we couldn't get the tube down safely and she refused to swallow when we tried a syringe. She got a Rumen Inj and antibiotic as well and we were left with Rumen to administer 2 x daily and 100 ml calcivax orally.

My second girl was 100% on Thursday morning, but Cormos no better and Veon popped over at crack of dawn and we tubed again with Rumen inj. I didn't notice her drink or eat at any time but I did see her urinate which was an indication that she wasn't dehydrated. That evening she plopped out a small patty. Strange how happy one can get when you notice the smallest bowel movement.

Friday we gave her another dose Rumen and some more Calcivax and I left Terrence for the weekend to go to a weekend workshop. There was no signal where I was and I couldn't focus I was so worried he wouldn't cope or she would take a turn for the worse.

Sunday when I returned, first thing I saw was her chomping away at the grass like she had never seen food before. She had some runny plops, urinating fine, eating ferociously and between the three of us we had no idea what the matter was.

Footnote: *For those unfamiliar with the acronym ADR (and I had to plead ignorance and ask Wendy), it is Jane Vaughan's terminology. Ain't doing right ... (Might have guessed! Ed).*



TIPS FOR NEW OWNERS - OUR NEW COLUMN ...

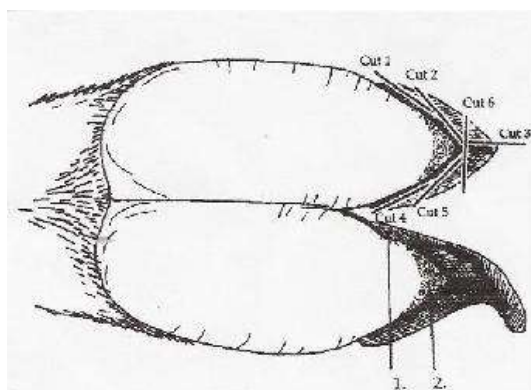
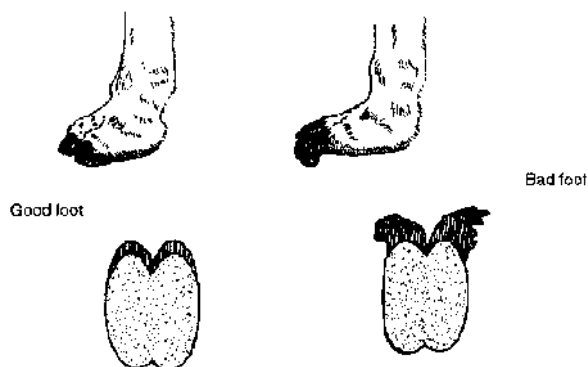
So here is a newsletter column to help new owners with their alpacas. Much of this was unknown to us when we started 20-something years ago and if we can impart a little bit of knowledge each month to our new members then I think it will go far in their handling and husbandry. So here for starters are some basic toenail trimming hints, and vaccination advice. Please everyone let's try to keep this going. It'll really help our new breeders.

1. Trimming alpaca toenails:

- the soft pads of an alpaca's foot are similar to those of a dog;
- the tough triangular shaped toenail which surrounds and protects the pad grows constantly;
- white toenails tend to grow faster than black ones and may need trimming two to three times a year;
- pruning shears are very handy to do this job;
- it is easier to trim toenails in wet weather when the nail is soft than in summer when the nail is hard;
- trim excess nail until the toenail is level with the foot pad;
- If the alpaca has been on wet or muddy ground you will need to use the nail clipper ends to clean the mud and manure so that you can see the pad, quick and the nail as well as see where to trim;
- if left unchecked the nail can twist over and around, causing lameness and extreme discomfort;
- try to train your alpacas to allow their feet to be lifted. As an alternative, trimming toenails at shearing time, when the animal is restrained, is an option.



Alpaca displaying badly overgrown toenails



#1 Be cautious here; if the nail is folded over, pressing on the pad, you may need to trim around the folded area. Then, trim the nail later, when it is wet and more flexible.
#2 This area is the "quick". Don't cut too close to it as it will hurt and bleed if damaged.



2. Vaccinations for alpacas.

Probably the most critical vaccinations are those designed to protect against the five clostridial diseases. Multivax P Plus and Covexin 10 seem to be the popular vaccines. Cria should be given their first dose at eight weeks of age (1.5 mls administered subcutaneously), and a booster (2 mls) at 3-4 months old. Thereafter every six months.

To quote from Jane Vaughan's *Glove Box Guide to Alpacas*,

- *the first dose is known as the priming dose and it stimulates the immune system of the alpaca to produce antibodies against the diseases in the vaccine;*
- *The second and subsequent doses are known as booster doses because after the second dose is given the immune system recognises the recently given vaccine and produces more antibodies for a more prolonged time;*
- *A booster dose every 6 months thereafter is required to maintain a protective level of antibodies in alpacas as clostridia perfringens antibodies may wane around nine months after vaccination;*
- *Timing of injection of this twice-yearly booster in female camelids should include a booster 4-6 weeks prior to parturition so that antibodies produced by the female enter the first milk, or colostrum, and are drunk by the neonate in the first 6-12 months of life. The antibodies are absorbed across the gut wall, enter the blood stream and circulate around the body, thus providing protection to the cria against clostridial diseases for approximately 8-12 weeks. This is known as passive immunity because the neonate did not make the antibodies itself.*

3. Vitamin AD3E

Alpacas may become deficient in vitamin D during the winter months when less sunshine penetrates the skin. This often manifests itself in angular leg deformities, possibly lameness, and rickets. Cria with vitamin D deficiency will often appear smaller than their herd members. They may also walk awkwardly with a hunched back appearance. Alpacas love the sun and how often do we see our alpacas 'feigning death' by lying prostrate, tummies to the sun absorbing their vitamin D?

Administering AD3E every six weeks during the winter months will greatly assist your general herd health.

Always consult your veterinarian if you are concerned.

Have a good month and thank you to everyone who supported our busy few weeks, entertained Helen, boosted morale, fetched and carried, and made us laugh when the chips were down. And no thanks to Eskom who challenged us to the hilt ...

Chat next month ...

