

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ALPACA BREEDERS' SOCIETY

July 2024

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UNDERSTANDING ALPACAS ...



... is what we will be doing in just over one week's time when Helen Macdonald, RVN will be addressing alpaca enthusiasts at Di's Alpaca Visitors' Centre in Walkerville, Gauteng on 4th and 5th August and then again at Helderstroom Alpacas in the Western Cape on the 9th and 10th. The weeks and months have gone in a flash.

Helen arrives in South Africa on the 2nd of August and will be coming to our AGM which will give her an opportunity to meet the incredible bunch that we are!!! Hm hm. Let me tell you a bit more about Helen ...

Helen Macdonald is a Registered Veterinary Nurse who qualified in 1994. During her professional career she has worked in a variety of clinical roles in small animal practice. She has worked as a self-employed locum nurse and held Head Nurse roles as well as Practice Manager of a large veterinary hospital. She holds NVQ assessor qualifications for student veterinary nurse training.

Helen bought her first three breeding female huacaya alpacas in 2002. She undertook Camelidynamics training and has hosted many events since. She promotes respectful handling and training methods. Her thirst for

alpaca knowledge saw her attending regional group meetings, annual conferences and completing the judge training course, although she is not a judge.

Initially, breeding males were selected from the UK but having the chance to 'buy a leg' of an elite black Australian male, she jumped at it and Mariah Hill Mambo provided the foundations for her black herd.

As Helen's herd steadily grew she attended halter shows, with highlight achieving Best Small Breeder award with just three black alpacas at the 2008 Futurity show under Judges Mike Safley (USA) and Paul Cullen (UK). Following further championship results in 2009 she stopped showing, choosing fleeces shows instead.

Helen's full c.v. is extensive - wait for the seminars!!

SO WHO IS COMING?

We are closing in on our target of 30 delegates at each location ...

Actually a very interesting cross section of delegates is attending - we have SAABS members - both seasoned and new; we have alpaca owners who are not SAABS members; we have delegates who don't even own alpacas but who want to attend to do their research before deciding whether or not to embark on the alpaca journey; we have vets, vets' assistants, we have one retired Pretoria vet who has never even treated an alpaca yet who still wants to learn about them; and we have the top specialist anatomical veterinary pathologist in the Western Cape. We also have Gavin attending at Helderstroom, who got most of us into alpacas in the first place!! We have a lot to thank you for Gavin.

We have advertised these seminars through the South African Veterinary Council, the South African Veterinary Association, Farmer's Weekly, LandbouWeekblad, our SAABS Facebook page and I know many of you have contacted your local vets, your own alpaca clients and via many other means. Thank you all for your efforts.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We experienced a first for us in this past month at Helderstroom. We've never before had colic in an alpaca, although over the years I have lost two horses to colic. Galinda is a nearly four year old female who had a cria in April. She presented with extreme abdominal pain one evening. No temperature, but huge discomfort. Our vet came, tubed her with a litre and a half of rumex, gave her an anti-inflammatory, pain killer and antibiotic and we waited. Sad to see her cria trying to suckle her mum while in the prone position.



We checked on her an hour later. She was still down but definitely looking more comfortable and four cria standing guard around her. I think she felt in safe hands. An hour and a half after that Galinda was up and acting as if nothing had happened.

There had been no change in her diet, we scoured the paddocks for anything toxic. All hay and lucerne bales look good. Couldn't find anything. it remains a mystery.

You can tell I'm a Brit because I always (still after 50 years of living in Africa) talk about the weather. This past month has been akin to the September 2023 floods except it didn't all come in one dollop. The rain fell incessantly over about two weeks, undoing much of the flood repair work of last year and causing numerous power outages. These seem to have become the norm in South Africa now.

There have been quite a few problem phone calls received in the last few months from petting farms where alpacas are kept, probably in less than satisfactory environments. I helped birth a cria a few weeks ago via a series of whatsapp messages.

Our newsletter may peter out if we are unable to receive contributions during the month. Or we could make them quarterly. It becomes harder and harder scraping the barrel of news from everyone. Does anyone have any opinions on this? Or is there anyone who enjoys writing who would care to take over as Editor?

BIRTHING VIRTUALLY AND ITS KNOCK-ON EFFECT

The good thing about birthing a cria virtually - well via whatsapp, with the owner and with the assisting vet - is that the assisting vet is now a delegate registered for our Gauteng seminar. If we, SAABS, don't help the vets to

help us no-one else is going to. The other good news that came out of this is that after a bit of sleuthing we found the person who had sold this owner a male and female together ... This is why EDUCATION IS KEY.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- **2nd August 2024** Helen Macdonald arrives in South Africa - just over a month and a week!!
- **August 3rd** SAABS AGM at Christie Bosman's garden centre in Brakpan, Gauteng;
- **August 4th and 5th** SAABS 2024 Understanding Alpacas Seminar with Helen Macdonald RVN at The Alpaca Visitors' Centre, Walkerville, Gauteng (following on from the AGM);
- **9th and 10th August** SAABS 2024 Understanding Alpacas Seminar Seminar in the Western Cape, at Helderstroom Alpacas in the Overberg.

The Responsible Alpaca Standard aims to improve the welfare of alpacas and the the ecosystems in which they are raised

The Responsible Alpaca Standard (RAS) is a voluntary standard that requires all sites, from alpaca farms through to the seller in the final business-to-business transaction, to be certified. RAS farmers and ranchers are evaluated against animal welfare, land management, and social requirements set in the standard.

James Brodie has kindly provided more on this Responsible Alpaca Standard. thank you James ...

In 2021, we began a sweeping revision of our standards framework with the aim of developing a harmonized system that incorporates outcomes aligned with our climate and nature strategy. Known as "the unified standard" during its development, the Materials Matter Standard was released with its official name for its pilot testing version. Bringing our standards under this framework will let us track and communicate progress more efficiently and effectively across all of the fibers and materials in the scope of our certification system, while increasing the value for participants. You can learn more about the development of the Materials Matter Standard in our [project plan](#).

In celebration of the United Nations declaration of The International Year of the Camelid
The South African Alpaca Breeders' Society
is privileged to host its

SAABS 2024 UNDERSTANDING ALPACAS SEMINAR

GUEST SPEAKER: HELEN MACDONALD, R.V.N.

*UK Specialist fine fibre alpaca breeder 22 years,
Registered Veterinary Nurse, consultant and provider of alpaca education
and training courses and more ...*

- Gauteng on 4th & 5th August 2024
- Western Cape on 9th & 10th August 2024



This carefully structured two day programme will follow the life of an alpaca starting from the point of a maiden dam and will cover topics, including **DAY ONE** • general farm management • biosecurity and disease control • nutrition and husbandry • gastro-intestinal parasite control • skin problems and external parasites • first aid and poorly alpacas • fluid therapy • dealing with trauma • Bovine tuberculosis **DAY TWO** • unpacking - the three stages of parturition • caring for the newborn cria • reproduction - normal and problems • post-partum complications • selecting breed stock • colour genetics - understanding the basics • fibre - evaluating fibre characteristics, usage and added value by processing • prepping fleece and skirting • an open forum Q & A session.

**A MUST FOR ALPACA OWNERS AND BREEDERS AND FOR
VETERINARIANS WISHING TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ALPACAS**

- **SAVC CPD POINTS AWARD APPLIED FOR** •

It's not too late to register.
Contact Alison Notley Tel: 082 662 9670
or email: alpacas@helderstroom.co.za

NEW SAABS MEMBER THIS MONTH!

We welcome **Yanic Klue** from Montagu in the Western Cape as a new member to SAABS. Yanic has 25 alpacas ... funny how we think we know who has alpacas and last month Jacques Erasmus popped up as a new member with 33 and now Yanic. I'm very glad they have come out of hiding. Both our new members are attending Helen's seminars - Jacques in Gauteng and Yanic here at Helderstroom.

MEET THE CRAFTY GEO ...

Hello, my name is Eva; I am The Crafty Geo.

I am a geologist by day, and a knitter by night. There is however a bit of a grey zone, as my knitting designs are inspired by Earth History, and carry names such as 'Crystal Lattice', 'Ammonite', or 'Crinoidea'. Currently I am working on 'Lapilli' - a cowl inspired by volcanic ash - and 'Lepidodendron' - a shawl inspired by a fossil tree.

My preference lies with lace and brioche knitting, and I published my first knitting pattern a year ago. I have given an introduction course into brioche knitting, and I am preparing another one on one-skein (shawl) knits.



Other than shawls I enjoy knitting sweaters, which I also started designing myself. But since grading is still intimidating to me, I don't have the courage to publish a sweater pattern in a range of sizes yet.

I am slowly getting to know the knitting community through knitting socials, and events such as the Karoo Winter Wool Festival, where I met wonderful members of the yarn world, such as Alison from Helderstroom Alpacas, who gave me the opportunity to contribute to this newsletter, and Judi from Karoo Moon who offered me the opportunity to design a textured scarf for her yarn. This is an exciting project, and I hope there will be many more to come.

If you would like to find out more about The Crafty Geo, you are welcome to visit my webpage at <https://the-crafty-geo.com>, or my social media accounts on Instagram ([the.crafty.geo](https://www.instagram.com/the.crafty.geo)) and Facebook ([The Crafty Geo](https://www.facebook.com/The.Crafty.Geo)).

Happy knitting!
Your Crafty Geo, Eva



WHERE DOES OUR NEWSLETTER HEADER COME FROM?

(Recycled article from July 2016)

In the very first issue of this newsletter, which was March 2014, I quoted from Eric Hoffman's *The Complete Alpaca Book*. South American folklore and Andean pastoralism in particular is strong and ingrained into the very soul of these humble people who raise alpacas in altitudes too high and too extreme for many species to exist. Consider these next paragraphs for a few moments. New members who have joined SAABS in the past two years may not know this –

THE AYMARA AND QUECHA people are the traditional owners of alpacas. A brief conversation recorded in the harsh physical environment of the Andes captures the essence of this way of life.

One cold night in the Andean highlands Felix Palacios and Nolberto Chambilla Mandamiento lay in their bedrolls looking at the stars. Around them knelt alpacas and llamas, their legs folded snugly under their woolly bodies. The animals' thick coats glistened with the frost that occurs 320 nights a year on the "puna", the high treeless plain.

Felix, then a graduate student in anthropology at the Catholic University of Peru in Lima asked Nolberto, an Aymara-speaking herder, "If all the alpacas and llamas died what would happen?" "We would die," Nolberto replied. "Why?"

"Because we raise alpacas and llamas and they raise us."



Nolberto's words represent traditional Andean pastoralism. His livelihood depended upon the exchange of animals and animal products from the inhospitable high altitude puna. The highlands herders share a kinship bond with their alpacas and llamas, a bond cemented by tradition, religion, genuine affection and harsh pragmatism.

Without trying to sound like Dorian Williams at the end of the UK Horse of the Year Show ... I leave you to reflect on ... *the alpaca*.

HELDERSTROOM'S BACKBONE

Alison Notley

Theresa Jansen has been with Helderstroom Alpacas since 2009, which was when we started spinning for ourselves, and the same year our twins were born. Theresa began spinning shortly after I'd learned so it was very much the blind leading the blind! And when we could spin proficiently we tried to see how finely we could spin - reckon Theresa would win any longest thread competition - and then our knitting ladies said, "and you expect us to knit with this?" So we fattened up our yarn a bit and now we mostly spin to just a bit finer than a DK yarn, and for babies' things, finer.

Theresa owns her own spinning wheel at home and undertakes "homework" spinning for clients, which she does in her own time as well as running her home at Loufontein, a neighbouring farm, with her husband Kallie, son Rodney and daughter Nasley.

Two years ago we found another spinning wheel for Nasley who, under her mother's tutelage, is already producing yarn. Not for us though yet - we don't do child labour ...!

We do slow processing at Helderstroom, not machine spinning. We are a cottage industry. We were trying to work out how many kgs Theresa has spun over 15 years. Difficult to calculate, so we gave up. Suffice to say it must be close to a ton - and pictured here is just one of the variegated yarns she has spun for us over the years. Raw white fibre dyed pink spun against natural grey and natural white. Knitted into a jersey which was sold to Poland!



At shearing time Theresa is integral to our activities and skirts the fleeces as they come off the animal. Then she manages just about the whole fibre processing. She has an excellent feel for the handle of fibre. We will see how she and we all fare at Helen's seminar on the fibre practicals!

Our herd is scaled down now. At our age we can't keep on collecting alpacas and also, doing every bit of the processing by hand, there's a limit to how much we can handle.

Thank you Theresa,

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