



Membership Renewal – 2020 cancelled

What a year 2020 has been; our last physical ‘get together’ was the AGM and that was back in February!

We all know that this business of ‘alpaca-ing’ is pretty much hands on and whilst we would have loved to have run a full programme of events through the year, it’s just been too difficult to do it in the way we would want to (you know our style, educational/social gathering, good company, copious amounts of food etc!).

In light of this we are cancelling all membership fees for 2020.

For those of you who have already paid (*don’t worry, we know who you are 😊*) we propose using that against your 2021 membership, but if you want a refund instead just let us know!

Upcoming Events

- **Midlands Championship Halter Show** – we needed to cancel our annual event in November, but if we are able to run an event in the New Year ahead of the BAS National Show we will *try* and do this.
- **AGM 2021 TBC** – our charter sets out that we need to run one annually, and if push comes to shove, we may need to do this via Zoom or similar.

! WATCH THIS SPACE ! – as soon as we are able to run events safely and within the prevailing rules at that time, we will.



2020 Royal Three Counties Fleece Show – Hosted by the West Shires Alpaca Group

Due to the “proper” Royal Three Counties Show being cancelled, the Committee decided to hold the fleece show a month later than normal in order give a greater chance of alpacas being shorn in time to enter. This proved to be a popular decision and we received 157 entries (including an encouragingly high number of Suri fleeces) from herds far and wide!

Roger Clarke did an excellent job of judging all of the fleeces over two days in Adam and Julia Berry’s barn at Apple Cross Alpacas. Julia was chief fleece steward ably assisted by husband Adam, Anne Cheston, Liz Welch and Trish Tatchell.



West Shires Alpaca Group Newsletter

October 2020



The standard of the fleeces was very high, with many achieving scores of over 80 points (including the darker colours – even blacks!) - So a very tightly contested competition with only a few fleeces achieving scores of less than 70 points. Consequently, we were pleased that all Champion and Reserve Champion Sashes easily qualified to be awarded. A number of classes had 10 or more entrants and some with only half a point or, a point separating the placings. It is worth saying that some of those placed 7th and below still had respectable scores in the 70s. So don't despair - it may be well worth entering those into one of the later shows (and re-skirt them, if that was a comment on your score sheet).

The Supreme Champion Huacaya fleece and receiver of the West Shires Alpaca Group Shield and Best British Bred sash was the Champion Light fleece (87 pts) belonging to **Beck Brow Edison Dix** owned by **Beck Brow Alpacas**. The Reserve Supreme Champion Huacaya fleece was the Champion White Fleece (85 pts) belonging to **Ashwood Maddison** owned by **Ashwood Alpacas**. The Judge's Choice Sash was awarded to the Reserve Champion Light fleece belonging to **Evolution Firebreather** owned by **Alpaca Evolution**.

The Supreme Champion Suri fleece and receiver of the Houghton Hall Shield went to the Champion White fleece (86 pts) belonging to **Evolution Blue Moon** owned by **Alpaca Evolution**. The Reserve Supreme Suri fleece went to the Reserve Champion White Suri fleece (83.5 pts) belonging to **Evolution Stetson** owned by **Alpaca Evolution**. The Best British Bred sash was awarded to the First placed Junior Light fleece of **Winsaula Casey Mack** owned by **Winsaula Alpacas**. Finally, the Judge's Choice Sash was awarded to the Reserve Champion Light fleece of **Beck Brow Falco** owned by **Beck Brow Alpacas**. All other Champions, Reserve Champions and placings can be found via the BAS website: [Fleece Show Results](#).

The West Shires Alpaca Group would like to thank everyone who entered their fleeces, the Judge, the Stewards and especially our generous Sponsors who were as follows:

- Supreme and Reserve Supreme Sashes: **UK Alpaca Ltd and Classical MileEnd Alpacas**
- White Championship Sashes: **Ashwood Alpacas**
- Light Championship Sashes: **Colin the Alpaca Shearer (Colin Ottery)**
- Fawn Championship Sashes: **Latton Alpacas Ltd**
- Brown Championship Sashes: **Snowhill Alpacas**
- Black Championship Sashes: **JG Animal Health**
- Grey Championship Sashes: **Pure Alpacas**
- Best of British and Judge's Choice Sashes: **Snowhill Alpacas**

Alpaca Fever!

Some of you may have read a report in the BAS weekly newsletter about a suspected case of Alpaca Fever by Roger Mount. An article will also appear in the Alpaca magazine and the Veterinary Journal. However, here, I will give a little more detail and context.

We had an alpaca, Porschia, who suddenly went down and seemed unable to properly use her front legs and was not able to stand. We immediately gave her 5.5mls of Metacam, 6mls of Betamox LA and 2mls of injectable AD&E. She was otherwise, seemingly, well. She was eating and drinking well.



She was rolling on her side to allow her 4-week-old cria to suckle. Her temperature was slightly raised at 39.2 °C. Porschia was a black nine-year-old Suri with 13 months fleece and weighed a hefty 100kg. However, she wasn't fat, just a big girl!

A couple of weeks prior to this "event", we had noticed that she had become very soft on her front pasterns. We put it down to her size and having been heavily pregnant. This condition didn't seem to hinder her movement and she was constantly jumping in and out of the water trough (which is well off the ground) during the heatwave. She was definitely suffering a bit. during the very hot weather but, no more so than some of the others. She was mated the day before she went down and, again, behaved normally.

The following day, we asked the vet to come and examine her and take bloods. We also suggested that she was given thiamine, selenium and more antibiotics. The vet examined her, listened to heart, lungs, gut et al. Nothing appeared out of the ordinary. Her temperature had risen a little to 39.4 °C. The cocktail, mentioned above, was then administered along with more Metacam and some steroids, to be given the following day. The initial diagnosis was that it was some sort of neurological problem but, the various treatments would do no harm.

The blood tests showed that nothing was out of the ordinary and there was no sign of any immune response to an infection. It was a mystery! However, in previous years we had had three similar cases, also following very hot weather, with equally negative blood results – all three died or were euthanized and were recorded as having had some form of brain injury or cause "unknown".

24 hours later, Porschia was clearly in distress. Her temperature had rocketed to 42.8 °C and she had a seizure and died.

We delivered her to the pathologist for a thorough post mortum. The initial diagnosis was Pasteurella! However, it was then decided this was unlikely as it hadn't been known to have ever affected camelids. So further research was done and photographs of the affected organs (fluid around the heart, the brain and spinal cord) were sent out.

The only match found was some post mortem photos of a few alpacas in North America. These had been identified as dying from Streptococcus Equi Zooepidemicus Polyserosites Septicaemia. Commonly known as "Alpaca Fever" in South America. There had only been two incidences recorded, and positively identified as such, in North America. One involved a number of alpaca deaths following a long re-location journey and another involved 3 alpacas that had recently suffered heat stress. The alpacas that had been on a long journey were also in poor condition – so were probably immune compromised. In South America, the condition is a more common cause of death, but it's known that heat stress is a major contributory factor for this opportunistic bacterium to get a hold. In Porschia's case, it wasn't possible to categorically identify the bacteria due to the amount of antibiotics having been injected into her.

This bacterium is commonly found in this country. Many horses are unaffected carriers, as are some dogs, cats and a few other animals. There has been a small number of sheep, goat and pig deaths recorded as being caused by this bug and it is possible for humans to contract it – especially if immune compromised (it is classed as being Zoonotic). The mortality rate is very high – somewhere over 50% and survivors are often left with some permanent neurological damage.



Luckily, it isn't highly infectious to those in good health and not stressed. Our other 300 plus alpacas are all very well.

The pathologist, who conducted the post mortum, along with other pathologists consulted on this case are now inclined to think that there may have been many more unrecorded incidences of this disease in UK alpacas. They believe that a number of adult alpaca deaths recorded as "unknown neurological", general Septicaemia and Meningitis could have well been due to this bacterium – particularly where blood tests have not revealed any infection (which is a known marker of this disease).

One of the interesting things, that came out all of this, is that dropped front pasterns can be an indicator of a heart problem in camelids (particularly when this appears as a recent condition in the animal). Of course, there can be a lot of causes for heart failure. Porschia died of heart failure due to the pressure of the fluid build-up between the pericardium and the heart. I'm not sure that this knowledge would have made much difference to the outcome, however, should dropped front pasterns occur following heat stress or, other stressful conditions, it would be advisable to immediately put the alpaca on a course of antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs. Penicillin and/or Streptomycin based antibiotics should be as effective, or more so, than any newer types. Generally, it has only been those that have been noticed and treated in the very early stages of the infection that have survived.

Whilst this disease might be more prevalent than had been assumed, it is still very rare and is not something to be alarmed about. However, should you have an alpaca that exhibits similar symptoms, it could be Alpaca Fever.

Should anyone be wondering, the cria was collected up and adopted by another mum (a first timer) within 20 minutes of Porschia having died.

Roger Mount

www.SnowhillAlpacas.com

Alpaca Assisted Therapy Brings Rewards



Former paramedic Victoria Barrett is a qualified counsellor who uses her specialist knowledge to offer alpaca assisted therapy through Camelid Connection at Simply Alpaca in Worcestershire.

Victoria manages the business, which also offers walks, weddings, training, experiences and visits, with husband Roger and until four years ago both were working full time.



They bought their first three alpacas 11 years ago with no plan to develop an alpaca business that would see Victoria give up her job as a paramedic. “We had no idea it was going to turn into this venture. It’s still quite small but it is massive to us,” says Victoria.

Victoria came across Camelidynamics soon after buying her first alpacas and has updated her knowledge almost every year since taking part in courses in the UK and US with the method’s founder Marty McGee Bennett. She is now the UK’s only Camelidynamics Senior Consultant, offering Camelidynamics courses at Camelid Connection, the training and therapy arm of SimplyAlpaca, Victoria describes the method, which is an integral part of her therapeutic work with clients, as “handling with respect”.

Victoria uses this specialist knowledge of alpaca behaviour and handling together with her experience as a counsellor to offer camelid assisted therapy at Camelid Connection. Clients, including adults and children with special needs, work with selected alpacas from the herd to achieve particular health outcomes.

“I just see a lot of parallels between working with animals and working with people because you are looking at needs and motivations and what applies to animals applies to people in just the same way. That’s when I started looking at combining the two into the therapy side of our work,” Victoria said.

Victoria has more than 25 years’ experience as a counsellor after training while working as a paramedic. She set up in-service counselling support for paramedic colleagues and has worked with clients suffering from depression, anxiety, abuse and trauma.

Most of the camelid or animal assisted therapy (AAT) work is based around the Camelidynamics handling course and clients work with the animals to improve particular physical, social or emotional skills. Victoria also offers non-therapeutic camelid assisted activities which she explains aims to improve quality of life simply through contact with animals.

To illustrate the hugely positive impact an encounter with alpacas can bring, Victoria mentions a family that came to visit with their young daughter who liked animals but found it difficult to interact with people. Her older sister was in a wheelchair as she was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME).

“We got the wheelchair into the barn and we set up an alpaca encounter. It was foul weather but we had prepared a pen so the youngest daughter could do some weighing and we could do some husbandry tasks with her. Then my daughter Tilly came in and went into the studio with the older daughter and they did some crafting together while we went off with the little one for a walk.

“Afterwards we all joined in with the crafting and mum left us with tears in her eyes.....she said that’s my children I haven’t seen them in so long. “

Being with the alpacas had given the youngest daughter the confidence to speak. “She chatted and chatted,” says Victoria. “She felt safe with the animals and by working with an animal you are automatically breaking down barriers - when an animal is safe with you then it suggests to the child or adult that I can be safe with you too.”

Victoria clearly had a big impact on somebody during this work as earlier this year she was nominated for an award and 2020 was chosen to be the Pride of Birmingham TSB Community Partner. She should have been presented her award at a



full reception in Birmingham in April but due to COVID-19 that was postponed and finally cancelled. But that didn't stop the event organisers, they went ahead and organised a virtual ceremony by awarding each individual in their own presentation and put together a YouTube show. At Victoria's presentation, held at SimplyAlpaca, she was surprised and delighted to be given her award by none other than Jasper Carrott.

Victoria has no idea who nominated her but "I feel very humbled by the words that people have spoken to me about their experiences here and hope I can continue to offer some calm in the middle of life turmoils".

Victoria says she never imagined when she took her first Camelidynamics course where it would lead. At each stage, as she moved up the ladder, she thought another course would be "just too much work." But each time she got on with it and built on her knowledge. She didn't have a business plan or an end goal in mind. "It just has a life of its own," she says. And now she has a trophy on the shelf to recognise her work.

Victoria Barrett

www.SimplyAlpaca.co.uk

