



Some General Information for the Potential Camelid Owner

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Native to the Andes Mountains, llamas and alpacas thrive at altitudes of 8,000 to 16,000 feet in areas of severe cold, gale force winds, and sparse and seasonable vegetation. In their native habitat, llamas are used primarily as a source of fiber, meat, and labor, while alpacas are used as a fiber and food animal.

The genus *Lama* is a member of the camel family. The *Lama* genus is comprised of four different species which are collectively known as 'camelids':

1. The Llama *Lama glama*
2. The Alpaca *Vicugna pacos*

Both of these species have been domesticated longer than any other species of animal with the possible exception of dogs.

3. Guanaco *Lama guanicoe*
4. Vicuna *Vicugna vicugna*

These two species are wild and are believed to be the ancestors of the llama and alpaca.

Currently, llamas and alpacas are very popular. There are more than 80,000 animals in the U.S. They are being used in a variety of ways, ranging from work and guard animals to companion and breeding animals. Both llamas and alpacas are clean, almost odorless, and very easy to care for. They eat grain, grass, and browse. Generally quiet and docile, llamas and alpacas are easy to train and work with.

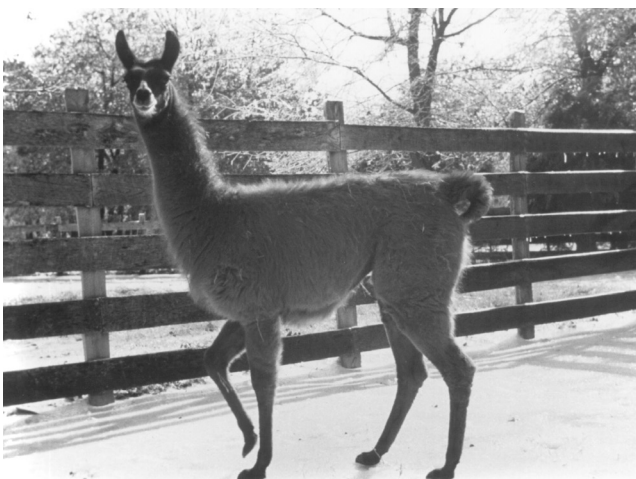


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The following are items of information that might be helpful to the prospective llama owner and breeder.

Some Camelid Data

1. Llamas and alpacas are pseudo ruminants and have three stomachs (cows, sheep, and goats—all true ruminants have four).
2. All four species have 37 pairs of chromosomes, will cross breed, and produce reproductively viable offspring.
3. Llama males average 300 pounds to 400 pounds and females average 230 pounds to 350 pounds. Adult alpacas usually range from 100 pounds to 175 pounds. The two breeds of alpaca are Huacaya and Suri. Huacaya fiber is short, crimped, and springy, while Suri fiber is long, has no crimp, and hangs down alongside the body.
4. Females are usually large enough to breed at 15 to 18 months of age, but this is dependent upon weight. Males should not breed until they are 2 1/2 years old. Males reach full sexual maturity at 3 years.
5. Reproductive capacity ends at 15 to 18 years old. However, life span is 20 years or more.
6. Gestation is 11 1/2 months (about 350 days plus or minus 14 days).
7. Camelids are induced ovulators and must be bred before they ovulate, so they do not show overt signs of behavioral estrus.



The Llama (*Llama Glama*).

8. Camelids breed with the female in sternal recumbency, known as the “kushed” position (sitting on her legs with her belly on the ground).
9. Breeding requires about 20 minutes.
10. Adults are called males and females. Babies are called “crias” and females usually have only one baby at a time.
11. Llama crias commonly weigh 15 to 30 pounds at birth. Alpaca crias usually weigh 8 to 20 pounds at birth.
12. About 90 percent of crias are born between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. and during daylight hours.
13. Most crias are born while the female stands.
14. Crias are covered with a thin cutaneous membrane that dries up and falls off soon after birth.
15. Females do not lick their young, but are attentive and good mothers.
16. Females may be rebred 14 to 21 days after birth of a cria.
17. The placenta of the camelid is diffuse and resembles that of the horse.
18. The female camelid has four teats.
19. Crias, similar to young ruminants, are dependent on colostrum for antibody protection after they are born. They should receive 5 percent of their body weight in colostrum within the first 6 hours of birth and 10 percent within the first 12 hours. Lack of adequate “passive transfer” (antibodies from colostrums) can result in severe illness. There are tests that can determine whether enough antibodies were ingested and absorbed by the cria.
20. Goat or cow colostrum will suffice if the dam does not have milk.
21. Crias should be weighed as soon as they are dry and their weight checked daily for growth. They should gain 1/2 to 1 pound per day for the first two weeks or so.
22. Camelids are very stoic and it is difficult to tell if they are sick. Owners should monitor feed intake and grazing along with temperature to determine illness.
23. Camelids have a split, prehensile lip.
24. Camelids require from 1.5 percent to 2 percent of their body weight of feed per day (dry matter basis).
25. Males have “fighting teeth,” two uppers and one lower on each side. These teeth should be cut off at about three years of age and again later if they grow out.
26. “Spitting” and “body charging” are normal herd dominance behavior patterns in males. These actions rarely occur against humans and should not be allowed. Bottle fed male crias tend to develop unacceptable behavior when they become sexually mature.
27. Camelids can suffer from heat stress when the temperature in degrees F added to the percent humidity approaches or exceeds 150 to 180°. To prevent heat stress, heavily woolled animals should be sheared before warm weather or have a cooled living space.
28. Prices vary widely, with male llamas bringing \$200 to \$1000 and females \$400 to \$3500. For alpacas, stud quality mature males and breeding females will fetch \$10,000—almost \$100,000. Prices have moderated from previous years and have currently stabilized.
29. They are easy to care for, not subject to very many diseases, and have few maintenance problems short of a periodic deworming and foot trimming.



Llamas have a split, prehensile lip.

Camelid Organizations

International Llama Association, Box 1891, Kalispell, MT 59903. Phone (406) 257-0282

Llama Association of North America, Box 1882, Minden, Nevada 89423. Phone (702) 265-3177

American Llama Show Association, Box 107, Ocate, New Mexico 87734. Phone (505) 666-2492

International Llama Registry, PO Box 8, Kalispell, MT 59903. Phone (406) 755-3438

Alpaca Owners & Breeders Association, 5000 Linbar Drive, Suite 297, Nashville, TN 37211. Phone (615) 834-4195

Camelid Books

Medicine and Surgery of South American Camelids, 2nd edition, edited by Murray Fowler. \$120.42

Alpaca and Llama Health Management, Veterinary Clinics of North America: Food Animal Practice. Volume 25, Issue 2, pages 239-552 (July 2009). Edited by David E. Anderson & Claire E. Whitehead. \$99.00.

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