HUSBANDRY AND WELFARE

By Charlotte Brockwell, Cadbury Alpacas.



Module 5: understanding shearing day

About the author

Charlotte has been running Cadbury Alpacas in North Somerset for over 12 years.

To find out more about her BAS affiliated courses:

www.alpacaemporium.co.uk

To find more BAS affiliated trainers and courses throughout the UK:

www.bas-uk.com/training-courses

Alpacas are a relatively new addition to the British Countryside, exports from South America to the UK started around 1996 as a commercial enterprise for fibre production. Originating from a very different climate in South America, camelids have specific husbandry needs in our climate which is paramount to their welfare. However there are still unregulated novice breeders and new owners acquiring welfare cases and "rescue animals" for example with house moves, without the education and support of an experienced alpaca farmer.

As alpacas are stoic (to mask illness from potential predators), sometimes new owners don't seek knowledge until an animal "suddenly" becomes unwell from the effects of not having their needs adequately met.

In some cases this may be avoidable as access to information is easily available online and through the BAS affiliated courses.

Well bred animals with good commercial fibre should be fetching premium amounts enabling reputable breeders to improve our national herd fibre quality and commerciality, and educate new owners. Instead rescue animals, herd disposals and welfare cases flood the market which then drops the value of good fibre producing non-breeding animals, as does the lack of a profitable commercial outlet in the uk for their fibre (a work in progress), as there is only enough processable fibre to support mini mills in the uk which drives the processing prices up and profit margins down. Owners learning how to use their fibre (modules 5 and 6) may help change this situation as we work towards establishing a commercially viable eco-friendly UK fibre industry.

The BAS recommends buying alpacas from BAS members who follow the Code of Conduct For Sale which includes full after care advice and support. Selecting the right breeder for support if you are new to this is just as important as selecting the right animals. One way breeders can help new owners is to offer or recommend a local BAS affiliated husbandry course which are run throughout the country by selected alpaca owners and breeders who follow an approved program of modules combining practical hands on learning, alongside facts and power points.

There is usually a discount for couples and lunch is included for full day courses. There are also lots of resources and husbandry fact sheets on the BAS website.

If you have acquired welfare cases please seek support from a local breeder and acquire husbandry information from a course or reputable resources. Unfortunately some "alpaca rescuers" could potentially neglect their specific needs from lack of knowledge, and there's nothing worse than novice owners exhibiting animals with poor welfare to the public for walking or petting without themselves knowing the basics.

A basic day long course consisting of modules 1-3 will set you back around £100 or less, a sound investment to avoid heartache and expensive, preventable vet bills.

Education is useful to new and potential owners alike to ensure the delivery of the alpacas' essential needs such as life in a group of same sex alpacas, access to shelter, fresh water and hay at all times, appropriate camelid minerals and vitamin D, regular worm and parasite screening and treatment if indicated, foot care, body condition scoring, vaccination and shearing.

Owning alpacas can be one the most rewarding endeavours but if you are unable to offer the basics for animals who can live around 20 years, please consider rehoming to someone who can by contacting the BAS welfare officer, and if you can re-home an alpaca, similarly please get in touch with the BAS.

Courses are offered all over the country by BAS Affiliate Trainers based on a set of nine modules approved by the British Alpaca Society. The first three modules are the essential ones for new and prospective owners and usually offered together as a single course.

Training and courses

Module 1: Feeding and basic management
Module 2: Vaccination, Supplements, Illness and Ailments
Module 3: Handling Alpacas
Module 3a: Herding and catching
Module 3b: Fitting a head collar
Module 3c: Basic Halter Training
Module 4: The Alpaca – What to look for
Module 5: Understanding shearing day
Module 6: Fleece – what to do with it
Module 7: Breeding and mating
Module 8: Birthing
Module 9: Marketing your alpaca business



Module 8: Birthing



Module 1: Basic management