

**The Importance of Good Record Keeping.**  
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As spring approaches, Alpaca breeders and more importantly their Alpacas, are hotting up for another breeding season. For many this is a time of great jubilation mixed with often greater frustrations in the mating shed – both human and Alpaca! No matter how frenetic outside life becomes, or indeed how much the sun shines, it is important to take time for the “boring” bit! Record keeping! No matter whether you have 2 or 200 record keeping is essential. As you will hopefully see in the course of the following article, records enable you to manage your time and your herd efficiently, and will provide you with historical data on your Alpacas.

During 2002 I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to help in the running of a quarantine of Alpacas on the Swiss/Italian border. When alpacas are placed in quarantine you really begin to understand the importance of record keeping, especially when Alpacas are “changing hands”. Over 100 alpacas can appear off a South American plane with not a scrap of history behind them, save for two Alpacas labelled with ribbon and cardboard. And so as you begin to work with unknowns you develop a fervent passion for record keeping.

I arrived in Switzerland with a clear idea of how things should be done. At home (Arunvale) we have a system of working in hard copy and then transferring this onto our computer’s herd management software. So I was all set, notebooks and files of every size and description and a laptop ready to roll. So with due care and attention the files were labelled in a typically Swiss fashion (English, German and Italian). In my experience the following categories are sufficient:

- Birth Book / Death book (though rare this is still important)
- Day book
- Vet book
- Weights book
- Mating/scanning/vaccinations and worming
- Movement records

**Birth / Death book**

In order to record births simply but in detail our book is set up as follows (the last two rows give a simple example):

Date of Birth	sex	Colour	Dam ID	Comments	Tagged?	Comp. entered	Owner	Sire	Birth Weight	Other Info.
				This may include birthing difficulties, poor lactation.	When your cria gets its first id this column will keep track of it.	Have you entered this on your database?	If you have Alpacas belonging to other people note it here.		Weighing cria is the easiest means of monitoring their progress and well being.	Perhaps an issue relating to the dam.
24/03/02	Female	s-blk	Eg.1	Looks premature – verified by mating records.	24/04/02 C1972-02	24/03/02	Jo Bloggs	P58	13lbs	Good mother, plenty of milk
09/09/2002	Male	S-MBR	Eg.2		25/09/02 CP89-02	11/09/02	Jo Bloggs	P54	17lbs	Back right teat swollen, milked out and given lactating cow tube.

There are many benefits to the above system. By recording information accurately you will quickly build up a picture of your females breeding capabilities. Problems like poor lactation may be a one off, perhaps nutritional, or it may be a problem your female has developed due to infection and will continue to be a problem – this will mean a need for extra vigilance with her cria. It could be that the cria will need bottle-feeding – something which may be time consuming but is well worthwhile. If you intend to sell your Alpacas you need to be sure that they are completely healthy. With accurate records you can sleep easy knowing that you have not passed a problem on. These records will also enable you to make informed decisions on whether to continue breeding. A note on a female's record can flag up the need for extra care and attention when she births next year.

Also contained within our births book is a section at the back for deaths. The death of an Alpaca is something that is inevitably heartbreaking. However, at all times the details need to be accurately noted, it may be a vital clue that could protect the rest of your herd. In this section we record the following information:

Date of Death	Gender	Ear Tag	Comments	PM
			Record here any preceding symptoms, where the death occurred, which group the Alpaca was with, was it brought in, have you cleaned out the area, did the vet attend, if so how often and what did he observe etc etc	Did you have a pm done?
le 1/05/2003	Male	Fictional!	Was found at noon in obvious discomfort. The vet was called and buscopan was administered to relieve colic. Temperature began to fall, attempts to raise temperature failed and the alpaca died within three hours. Stable disinfected following pm. Alpaca previously in Field A.	Yes – report forwarded to insurance company.

### **Day Book**

In this book a record is kept of everything that goes on with the Alpacas. In this book you would find details of all the following things:

- Treatments of medical nature, whether administered by staff or vets. This will include all on-going treatments as well as one offs. This is not only vital for spotting recurrent problems within your herd but also on a wider scale. If we as breeders, large or small, are all conscientious we should one day be able to collate our knowledge and share it with others. We will discover and learn more about these animals if we record our observations and treatments, no matter how inconsequential they seem – they could be a fundamental cog in the bigger picture!
- The daybook will also record the date of whole herd vaccinations, worming, scanning, and vitamin injections/drenches.
- Foot trimming, shearing, teeth grinding.
- Movements round the farm. (As your herd grows you will find it useful to keep a written record of where each Alpaca is, the daybook will help you maintain an accurate list.)

### **Vet book**

As the name suggests a vet book will help you to record visits to your farm by a vet. In it you should look to record the following:

- The name of the vet
- The date of the visit
- The purpose of the visit i.e. illness, scans, vaccinations?
- The Alpacas they saw.
- Observations made in the case of sick animals.
- The prescribed treatment i.e. what, when, how often and why?
- The length of the visit – you may wish to check the length of the visit against your invoice!

It is all too easy to become preoccupied when the vet visits your herd, you find yourself absorbed by your suffering Alpaca and as the vet drives out the gate you get that sinking feeling – “was it 2ml of medicine 3 times a day or 3ml of medicine 2 times a day. Was that Intramuscularly or

subcutaneous? Was it for my nerves or the Alpacas mastitis!!". Ask your vet to take the time to write it down for you or to check what you've written. Most importantly make sure they help you understand why! All record keeping is about learning and letting others learn from your experience.

### **Weights Book**

Weight is a very good way of monitoring health. It can determine many things from readiness for mating (when coupled with D.O.B) to poor growth in a cria. For the first 6 weeks of their life we aim to run an alpaca through the shed about twice a week. In smaller herds this may be over kill. Weanlings are weighed at weaning, two weeks and four weeks after weaning and then regularly through the winter and up to mating. Adults are weighed and/or condition scored as they enter and come out of the winter months. All the weights are then recorded in the working notes of the herd database or on a separate excel worksheet.

### **Herd Records**

The management software we use enables us to produce a variety of reports. These include:

- Mating due – this will tell us the females ID, when she is due to be run by, when she was last mated, what she did last time she was run by i.e. sat or rejected, if she has a cria at foot, who her sire is, who her cria's sire is, and any notes or observations i.e. that she has mated several times before so may need to see a vet for further advice. As we build our national herd we must be sure to keep accurate breeding records. This will allow us to watch and monitor bloodlines as they grow and develop, we will see where the best genetics are coming from and improve them further. If you are lucky enough to find yourself with a male of true stud potential that you wish to market externally, nothing will sell him better than his breeding records which in time will give you clear evidence of his stunning progeny. The database we have developed allows us to view previous cria for all our alpacas, so at the click of a mouse, though good record keeping, we can see which of our males is producing the best, most consistent lines. Even if you use the stud services of another breeder make sure you are given a comprehensive breeding record and reciprocate this with details of your births to their males – in the long run the whole industry will benefit and no breeder wants to be using a male that does not produce good results. Your success is their success!
- Vaccination / Worming due – this gives details of all the Alpacas due for worming and/or vaccination. It also shows when they were last vaccinated, which allows us to monitor the time between first and second vaccinations of cria.
- Ultrasound due list – this brings females up for their 45 and 60 day scans.

With all these lists we simply write down the record for the animal. So once vaccinated the ID is ticked, or once mated the males ID is written alongside the females. The date of the activity is clearly recorded at the top. Once the information has been transferred to the database the sheet is signed off and filed in the appropriate historical file. The database then allows us the following "picture" of all that has happened to our Alpaca in the past:

Alpaca Herd Management System - [Current Alpaca]

Close Records Home View View History... Print Only

## Arunvale Alpacas

Current Animal: P18

General Details | Additions/Events | Owner Details/Location | Comments | Medical Notes | Weaning Notes

### Mating Details

Next Mating Date:  Mated To:

Mating Result:  Rejection  In-Mated  Cr - Not Mated

Mating Details:   In Fieldbook

### Treatments

Vaccine Date:  Vaccine Type:

Worming Date:  Wormer Type:

Other Date:  Other Type:

Operation Date:  Operation Type:

### Scanning Details

Ultrasound Scan Date:  Not Scanned:

Ultrasound Scan Result:  Positive  Negative  Inconclusive

### Status Summary

Date	Status Code
12/06/01	UPP12
29/05/01	RejectingP52
15/05/01	RejectingP52
03/05/01	MatingP52
19/04/01	MatingP54
08/03/01	SNPP54
22/02/01	Wormed
22/02/01	Vaccinated

Records: 26 of 141. Page 1 of 400

Print View

This page shows us, at one glance all that has been done to that Alpaca, when treatments such as vaccinations are due, when she is due to be scanned. From this page we can also record her births or her death, if she has a cria this can be weaned. In one step we have a complete history, and reliable point of reference for this Alpaca.

- Movement record – Whilst not yet legally required a record of all movements, on and off farm, is sensible. Not only does this allow you to keep physical track of your alpacas, but in the event of disease outbreak you can show traceability of animal movements.

All of the above points may seem like common sense, a bit daunting, or unnecessary, but once in place they will allow for the efficient running of your herd, saving you time and money that can be spent simply enjoying your alpacas. So, in short, when you commence your breeding season, don't forget the importance of record keeping for the future of your herd and the future of our industry.