



Alpacas on the Costas

In the summer issue of Alpaca World Magazine Nigel and Ginny Cobb brought us news of the establishment of alpaca breeding in Spain. This issue they bring us up to date with progress and describe how blanket health controls can have unexpected effects...

Europe is beckoning for the British breeder. Mainland Europe is seeing increased alpaca ownership. Spain is now joining in on the party with plenty of people enquiring about owning alpacas.

The Spanish themselves are taking a bit longer to convert to these animals, but certainly there is interest amongst them. Their problems are fencing (much of the Andalucian farmland is unfenced, with sheep and goats being herded in the traditional manner), theft, a certain distancing towards animals generally and lack of knowledge about what alpacas can do for them. So, it may be some time before we start selling our alpacas to the Spaniards, but with a market of over ½ million English who live out here we will keep trying.

Our girls have given us six wonderful cria this summer, now that they are coming up to weaning we are more able to see their standard and we have to say that we are not disappointed.

Many people have questioned us about how well the alpacas deal with the heat in the mountains above the Costa del Sol with temperatures regularly above 40°C. But the dryer air at 700 metres has meant that they appear very happy here. After all their fibre gives them double glazing! They use shade sometimes but more often can be seen lying out and seemingly luxuriating in the sun.

So they are really prospering but we have been dealt a blow with Blue Tongue, a disease that was rife in Africa but now can be found in many parts of mainland Europe. DEFRA have decreed that alpacas have to be vaccinated for blue tongue if they are to be imported into the UK. Since there is no experience of vaccinating these animals, it may be an impossible demand to meet.

It seems to us, and more importantly to Professor Murray Fowler of California University, that DEFRA and the EU have completely misunderstood the threat of this midge-borne disease in relation to alpacas. Why should they bother to get to the facts, when they can just include alpacas with sheep, goats and cows and no one will bother about it? Why should they consider alpacas different, when their experience and handling of diseases in ruminants has been so suspect (FMD, BSE) and they now are trying to make amends with blanket orders and restrictions? Why take the risk?

Camelids do respond to exposure to the blue tongue virus by mounting an immune response (titre) but the clinical disease is either not seen in camelids or is extremely rare. There is absolutely no evidence that they are carriers or are a source of infection for any other animal. In fact, there have been no reports of camelids being a source of any contagious infectious disease in any other species of animal

So DEFRA's requirements for alpacas being imported into Britain from mainland Europe needing vaccinations seem rather inappropriate. It makes doing business very frustrating and

may put the animals' health at risk. We just hope that the newly formed Camelid Trust can do something here, as Europe is a real opportunity for the British alpaca industry.

We had great fun in November at the first British Futurity Show. We had hoped to bring over a small contingent of alpaca admirers from Spain but in the end it was just us representing the Spanish alpaca owner. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting so many friends, seeing some wonderful alpacas and being able to share experiences. Congratulations to those who took the risk in getting this off the ground and we hope that the venture will become part of the regular show calendar.

It did help that we had entered one of our females, Matilda, sired by Wessex Mateus, one of the sponsoring males. She won Reserve Champion in the Intermediate Fawn category. We were really pleased with this result. However, since Matilda is in England we have had no option but to sell her before we were about to ship her to Spain, again due to the difficulties DEFRA put in the way of our business. It is sad, as selling one of your best females is no way to breed professionally, but we wish her well with her new owners.

One of our concerns has been the lack of good alpaca machos in Spain. We have been used to having great bloodlines bred into our females, but that door has been temporarily shut to us. There is no such quality currently available in Spain and we cannot bring the females back to England for mating. We recently bought a lovely young male in Australia, Barron, with excellent pedigree and he is currently a little slow to mature but is trying hard. He is working with our friend's alpacas, Xandra Gamazo of Alpacas Hispanica, near Madrid. We need to have a range of good males and so have come to an arrangement with EP Cambridge to import three of their sires; a pure Accoyo solid white male, a lovely grey and a fine looking young fawn. We collected them from Tours from Tim Hey who had kindly brought them from England, together with the kitchen sink – well not the sink, but a range cooker for our finca that we could not buy here! For us, this was a five day journey, stopping off with fellow alpaca enthusiasts, Lindsay and Richard Naylor, in Dordogne and at Xandra's cortijo in Toledo, near Madrid. We hope that with this variety of males we can continue to improve our herd and give an excellent service to our clients in Spain.

We held the first show for alpacas in our region in October. Invitations were sent to around 200 Spanish, English, Dutch, Scottish and German people living in this part of Andalucia. The show was a great success with over 120 people coming to see the alpacas – certainly the fact that these animals now exist in Andalucia is becoming well known and we are beginning to get reasonable and sensible questions about them. So it was well worth doing and we hope next year to show off our animals in more locations.

Jane and John Powell have a wonderful rural property near Gaucin, a few miles away from us. They love animals and have a need to keep their land a little more under control and felt that alpacas might be the answer. They have started with two wethers, King Kong and Toffi and a lovely young female, called Lola, bred by us. Jane, who also breeds deerhounds, says about her new acquisitions 'They are gorgeous animals and are very special. They go up on the mountain in the day and back down at night for some hay and feed. We then keep them in, letting them out to explore our campo in the daytime. It seems to work very well. We have even seen Antonio, a local Spaniard who loves riding, getting off his horse to talk to them'. We can't believe there could be a more caring owner than Jane and we are very pleased to have supplied her with some fine animals. Lola will be mated by the time this article appears and we are looking forward to her first cria.

So, we are flourishing in Spain and we are looking forward to developing alpaca ownership with numerous people who have been in contact with us. Do make contact if you are thinking of coming here with or without alpacas. We are keen to help.

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