

## **2006 BVCS Conference**

- Venue

Alfriston, E Sussex

- Guest Speaker

Dr Pat Long, Oregon

- Topics

Nutrition

Rickets

Herd health management

Reproduction

Uterine torsion

Field anaesthesia

Care of the geriatric camelid

Work of the Alpaca Research Foundation

- Other presentations

Lymphoma

Leg injury

BVD

Foot disease

Topics from the 2006 international camelid conference

TB

The 'five minute camelid consult'

- Practical sessions held at Atlantic Alpacas

Husbandry, handling and basic techniques such as foot and dental care, condition scoring, microchipping and ear tagging, injection sites, blood sampling and castration

Management, anatomical abnormalities, ultrasound examination at varying stages of pregnancy

- Reports

## I

Many people say that they are happy if they attend a CPD session and come away with just one useful tip. If that is so, then those who attended this year's annual conference of the British Veterinary Camelid Society in mid October should have been no less than ecstatic. As is usual at our meetings, there was a lively exchange of views and information, so that everyone took home new ideas and techniques

Guest speaker Dr Patrick Long DVM joined us from Corvallis in Oregon where he has a mixed practice, spending over half his time working with llamas and alpacas. He has specialised in camelids since 1982 and is well respected in his field, in demand as a speaker at both national and international meetings as well as being the co-author of the Llama and Alpaca Neonatal Care book

One of his special interests is camelid nutrition, particularly important because in the wild, camelids are selective and opportunistic browsers. Given the choice, they will eat only the most nutritious parts of plants and research has shown that when the average plant protein content is 10%, cuds taken from grazing camelids will contain 15% protein. This can only apply when they are allowed plenty of space and opportunity to pick and choose what they will eat. When confined and therefore on a restricted diet, it is important that it fulfils all nutritional requirements, otherwise marginal deficiencies will eventually cause a problem

Whilst at college, I never found the intricacies of nutrition particularly enthralling but Dr Long explained it very simply. Because camelids have evolved to survive in a harsh, nutrient-poor environment, their gastric fermentation of fibre is the most efficient of all domesticated ruminants, and consequently they need a daily dry matter intake of only 1.5-2% of body weight. For the average alpaca this equates to about 1.5kg, which should be made up mainly of forage, using pelleted feed only to balance the ration. Forage analysis is the key factor along with the subject's weight, condition score and ideal dietary requirements for the particular life stage (growth, maintenance, lactation etc). Thereafter, calculating dietary constituents with the help of the charts Pat gave us proved to be a fairly straightforward exercise and means that we can offer sensible advice to owners

Once we had covered the broad outline, we moved on to more specific matters such as the particular nutritional needs of young camelids. As they go through a period of especially rapid growth at three to four months of age, they are at risk of developing rickets. Clinical signs vary from shifting lameness and a stilted gait through to bunny hopping and eventually severe epiphysitis will lead to angular limb deformities. Only a few years ago, stapling or periosteal stripping was used to partially correct this problem, but the syndrome is now rarely seen as research has shown that the underlying cause is insufficient Vitamin D leading to reduced absorption of calcium

In their native environment, at high altitude with plenty of sunlight, there is adequate synthesis of Vitamin D all year round. However in the UK, as in Dr Long's native Oregon, we experience a very different climate which means that crias born in the late summer, with insufficient time to build up reserves of Vitamin D in the liver, face going through their rapid growth phase over the winter when lack of sunlight compounds the problem

The recommended dose of Vitamin D is 450 iu/kg I/M at 3 monthly intervals, and many breeders administer a single injection in October/November, repeated in January/February. This will provide adequate cover until the youngster is weaned and the pelleted ration can provide any necessary supplement

However, the recent withdrawal of Fort Dodge preparation Duphafal ADE from the UK market has left us with a huge problem. Oral preparations need to be given at a much higher dose and far more frequently, necessitating extra handling. Also, given their propensity to spit when stressed, administration by this route in camelids is often wasteful (not to say extremely messy). Continued discussion revealed that injectable Vitamin D preparations are still available elsewhere and a delegate from France offered to send us details which are now available on the BVCS website for anyone who wishes to investigate further

Pat is also interested in herd health management and reproduction and he spoke on both these topics as well as field anaesthesia and care of the geriatric camelid. As the camelid industry in the UK matures, we are now reaching the stage where there is a sizeable number of elderly llamas and alpacas, with implications both for management and welfare issues. It is most important to ascertain the attitude of the owner - in a commercial herd, loss of production is obviously a vital factor and may decide the fate of the individual. However, many camelids are kept as pets and when faced with an owner considering quantity rather than quality of life, we must keep the five freedoms in mind

After the age of 13-14, reproductive potential wanes and aiming for a cria every year is likely to seriously compromise the body condition of elderly females. However there are reports of 22 year olds still breeding successfully and Hummer Country - see [www.dwranch.ca/Hummer\\_Country.html](http://www.dwranch.ca/Hummer_Country.html) is currently asking for details of other record breakers

General guidelines should be as for other species - Pat Long tends to use those designed for geriatric cats. Regular health checks will allow for early detection and treatment of conditions such as arthritis, tumours and dental problems. Blood work ups should be done early in the course of any departure from normal health, with special attention to total protein, liver and kidney parameters, and any evidence of anaemia. Diet may need to be amended to allow for extra nutritional needs or dental problems. Camelids have a very strong social hierarchy, and loss of status may lead to difficulty in gaining access to communal feeding stations in addition to disease predisposition secondary to stress

Dr Long is also a director of the Alpaca Research Foundation, and a look at the projects they have funded, and the ways in which information can be accessed, led on to a useful discussion as to how the BVCS could work with the newly-formed British Camelids Trust to develop new studies in the UK. Although much useful camelid research has been done elsewhere, particularly S. America, the USA and Australia, the increasing number of camelids in the UK over the last few years means that there is a need to address the health status of our own national herd

This rise in numbers also means that many vets are being asked to deal with a species with which they are unfamiliar, so our practical sessions are becoming increasingly important. These were held at Atlantic Alpacas, one of the largest holdings in the UK with over 1,500 alpacas as well as llamas (and a very friendly bactrian called Mo). The initial session covered husbandry, handling and basic techniques such as foot and dental care, condition scoring, microchipping and ear tagging, injection sites, blood sampling and castration – an excellent introduction for newcomers. The second practical afternoon was in more depth, including a fascinating insight into the management on this farm where large numbers of alpacas are herded by dogs with their handler on a quad bike. There was the chance to clinically examine a wide range of different camelid types, spotting variations and abnormalities and the afternoon concluded with ultrasound examinations of females in varying stages of pregnancy

The last part of the weekend offered the opportunity for delegates to share their own clinical cases. They included presentations on lymphoma, a fractured digit, BVD and foot pad problems. There was an overview of the International Camelid Conference held in Ohio this spring, a discussion about TB and what turned out to be a synopsis of the whole weekend, the 'five minute camelid consult'

The social side of the programme is always very important at our meetings. As well as plenty of time to exchange information and gossip over coffee, lunch or at the bar, this year it included an informal pub meal on the first night, followed by the BVCS dinner on the second and then an intriguing murder mystery party to round it off

Overall, it proved to be an excellent weekend for vets interested in camelids, with a good mixture of work and play. Full details will be available in the form of the written proceedings which are published after each of our conferences. See the website [www.camelidvets.org](http://www.camelidvets.org) for availability as well as for further information about the BVCS





Guest speaker Dr Patrick Long (in the baseball cap, naturally) meets Mo the camel