



Articles by Gary and Felicia Sanders, Popham Alpacas

A collection of articles from various publications about the Popham Alpacas journey over the years

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Our Life with Alpacas

"Oh, by the way how much are these females". I ventured to ask. But before the lovely fellow who was escorting us amongst his wonderful herd of alpacas had a chance to answer my wife had turned and given me one of those glares I had thought were only reserved for the divorce courts.

"I'm just wondering ", I ventured again. "Between four and six "came the reply which I just managed to catch over the top of my wife's sigh of disgust.

"Oh, that'll be four and six hundred"

Piercing daggers once again from Felicia. "No four and six thousand" came the reply from the lovely fellow. "But if she births a female you'll double your money overnight" he re-assured me.

I was about to ask how much a fleece might be worth when one last look at Felicia assured me that I had completely over stepped the mark, so I kept very quiet from there on.

This conversation had come to pass as our daughter, who had kept ponies for many years was now moving on to further education. The ponies were wasted with us and needed to move on. This left some very empty fields. It was early 2002 and Easter saw the arrival of three pregnant huacayas and two wethers. The purpose of these wethers was allegedly to keep the females company. I still do not understand why we needed the wethers but we had been assured by the lovely fellow that once the cria arrived (hopefully girls) we could sell them for a profit. On this point he was correct. We did but I still not sure we ever doubled our money on the female cria!

That summer saw the arrival of our first cria. Two girls and a boy. We were on our way. One of the girls was a suri. Yes, an F1. All in the plan I was assured by my now expert wife. We gave them the highly original names of Joey, Phoebe and Monica. Had there been a fourth I'm sure he would have been called Chandler!

At this stage of our life with alpacas I was still running two busy optical practices and probably wasn't that interested in the animals, rather doing the grunt work and leaving most of the rest to Felicia. Two things happened that changed my opinion of and my life with alpacas. The first was a talk by Eric Hoffman at Bozewood. I can't remember exactly when, but I do recall how it really opened my eyes to the world of alpacas. I left with a real buzz and a desire to learn more. The next factor was an advert by Wessex Alpacas for an organized trip to Peru to the Alpaca Fiesta in 2003. We signed up.

This was the most wonderful trip, not only because of the alpacas, the trips to the fiesta, the mills, the ruins, Machu Pichu, Colca Canyon, The Chaccu. Oh, I could go on and on, but it was really the wonderful people we met. Not only from the UK but also abroad, Australians, Americans and of course the Peruvians. Felicia had won. I was now an alpaca convert.

I think it was a year or two later that I sold one of my practices to Specsavers, Felicia then cut down her work in the remaining practice and we decided to invest some serious money in alpacas.

This involved a trip down under and after one of the most stressful times in my life what seemed like an eternity later 8 female huacayas and 2 male huacayas arrived at Popham. This was by now mid 2000's and to be honest probably wasn't my best move. The females were far better than the males and have fortunately formed a very strong basis to our huacaya herd. The males were not as good as the females. From this I have learnt one very big lesson in the alpaca business and that is that alpacas do NOT do what it says on the tin!!

Meanwhile Felicia was making some purchases at home in her department... the suris. She came up with a gem of a male called Inca Matador. Ok I concede an imported male but already on our shores so no stress. Matador proved to be one of best purchases along with some females from the soon to be sold on Cambridge suri herd including a female called Jazz. Matador introduced into our suris something called lustre and it remains there in his progeny and continues holding strong further down the line. Jazz, well what a female. You could mate her to a donkey and still breed a champion.

We had some wonderful showing results in those days with our suris but this was Felicia's department. My huacayas were still some way of the mark.

Work to be done and more money spent. This time investing in outside matings. We sent one of our two black huacayas to Stresleki at Cambridge and purchased a female from them who was already on our farm on commission sales. The female was called Missy and she had given birth to a white male we had called Cambridge Joshua. I had taken a real shine to Joshua. He did very well in the show ring himself but it

was his progeny that really brought out his best. The finest of these was of course our 2015 National Supreme Huacaya called Popham Havengore. The other investment, that being the Stresleki mating resulted in Popham Thunder who doesn't need any introduction. This outstanding male was, I confess a fluke, if only all breeding decisions, no matter how conscientious your research is, could be as successful as this you would soon be a rich man! Thunder was syndicated for a lot more money than I could ever have achieved had I kept him at Popham. I only had two black females, one was his mother. It was a difficult decision to sell but I am happy it was correct in the end.

At last I was competing with my dear wife. In the meantime, she had cracked Judges Choice at the 2011 Futurity with Popham Suri Dream Catcher. A grandson of Jazz.

Reading through this tale I realize that all I've really talked about is showing. Well I don't think the market would be as vibrant as it is without the show ring but I also realize the "industry" needs to mature. Whether this happens in my lifetime needs to be seen. For the foreseeable future I believe it will be a seed stock business revolving around the shows but at some point, this must change as we cannot all be seedstock producers.

In 2007 we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary with a round the world trip. As alpaca breeders you can't take part in one of these without including an element of alpaca into the itinerary. So apart from visiting Singapore, Hawaii and the States we also stopped by Australia and hired a car and drove from Sydney to Adelaide on the amazing coastal road stopping in Melbourne for the Australian Nationals. After this we carried on to Adelaide and visited Ambersun Alpacas. It was on this stopover that we discovered the wonderful world of appaloosa alpacas and a young appaloosa male called Camouflage. So here I was importing again after having sworn to never do it again. I'm pleased to say this experience proved to be a lot less painful than the first and Camouflage has now been with us for many years. He has successfully produced appaloosas and has sons standing at stud in Germany, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Ireland, Scotland and of course here in England.

Our herd has now grown to around the 120 mark. I would like more but our small acreage restricts the numbers. We are split 60/40 huacaya/suri. Of late we have tended towards the lighter colours and our appaloosa programme which we have restricted to huacaya.

Felicia's success with the suris has continued and 2016 saw Popham Suri Carlos win Supreme Suri at the Nationals. Yet another grandson of the wonder female Jazz.

Slowly but surely the alpacas have taken over our lives. Felicia retired from the optical world completely in 2015 and last year I sold my practice in Wadebridge. I am now an apprentice judge and hope to certify in 2019. In November 2017 I had my second knee replacement so the plan is to now concentrate fully on the alpacas and with our two holiday cottages here at Popham we hope to combine the two into some form of alpaca lifestyle exercise, offering walks, lifestyle weekends and courses.

Many people ask us why alpacas? I feel it's a combination of factors. Firstly, the anticipation of what the next years cria might bring. Don't forget it's a very slow business and if you get it wrong it takes another year to see if you've got it right. Another factor is with the right choices you can see the improvements in the quality within a few generations. This encourages you to go on. Not that it's easy but I feel if alpacas produced two or three cria every 6 months all looking the same the attraction would not be there. Having bred Wiltshire Horns for a short period I know this to be so from personal experience. Our lambs only had numbers, never names, which was just as well as they were destined for the freezer.

Popham in France

An article from the CCA Newsletter

Felicia and I have just returned from our yearly adventure to the European Alpaca Show at Vierzon in France. The first morning back at work was very difficult. I felt as though I was still rolling around on the ferry and not quite connected with my surroundings.

This general state of confusion may have something to do with all the celebrating. Popham Columbus (born here at Popham on May 19th 2005 and sent France in 2006 with this victorious day already planned) was crowned Supreme Huacaya Alpaca. So often the runner up, he finally pulled it off even with his poodle haircut.

Actually the cross channel alliance of Popham Alpacas and Quelvehin Alpacas (our associate breeders in Brittany) had a pretty good weekend. Not only did we bag Huacaya Supreme but also took home Brown Huacaya Champion, Black Huacaya Champion and Coloured Suri Champion. As you can see from the photo they look pretty happy about it !!!!!



I do love our trips to France, we're only 15 minutes from the ferry this end, a few beers on the ferry then we wake up in France and we feel as though we are on holiday. This is our 5th trip to this show, but the first time we have walked away with the big one. Quelvehin Alpacas and gites are about a 90 minute drive from Roscoff and the accomodation is wonderful. We haven't had a bill yet either !!

On the Friday we load the alpacas up and start about a 5-6 hour drive to Vierzon where we





always stay at the Arches Hotel. A strange hotel to say the least but by now it is almost home from home. The public areas are decorated with framed posters and photos of 1950's era movie stars plus old juke boxes etc - rather quirky, but nice to have something different from the usual standard hotel decor.

The Friday night saw the AGM of the French alpaca society and don't ask me why but Jane and Steve had to endure a rather difficult meeting while Felicia and I nipped off to the pub. Why is there always politics in the alpaca industry, no matter where I go you find it. Something to do with egos I guess.

I must confess the post victory celebrations on the Saturday night were a bit subdued. We were knackered basically. However Sunday saw us up early and packing up ready for the return journey. Then before you know it it's Monday morning and we're heading off back to Roscoff and work!!

A Spotty Tale

When we first saw an appaloosa alpaca in Australia in 2007, we became very excited realising it would add another dimension to our breeding program in the U.K. Rather than purchase a fawn or white male, which was our initial intention we imported an appaloosa male.

We were at the time staying with Chris and Adrienne at Ambersun Alpacas, we were intrigued by their appaloosa line. All with delightful names like Confetti, Jag, Leopard and Cheetah. Their appaloosas were historically related back to a single female called RCA Safari. She was marked with different sized dark fawn spots and patches. She was not an appaloosa but more aptly described as a fancy. Two females were born to Safari, neither of which were appaloosas. The leopard appaloosa markings began to show in the next generation. Looking through their herd we came across Camouflage, who though still very young at 15 months old looked fantastic and was covered in spots.



Camouflage at Ambersun in 2007

His sire was the now late but very famous Jolimont Warrior. His dam, Sprinkles was a dark fawn/light fawn appaloosa female out of ILR PPPeruvian Auzengate and she was one of the first appaloosas to be born at Ambersun. Camouflage's first fleece was the finest from the Ambersun herd of over 1000 in 2007, coming in at 14.7 micron. His latest sample taken in 2015 comes in at 24.4 micron at the age of 9 years.

Camouflage arrived in the U.K in early March 2009. We realised that some, probably many would wonder why we had set out breed something with spots, when surely the industry is all about the uniformity of colour. In the early days we did come across quite a bit of opposition but to counter this there the interest shown was tenfold. We believe there is a place for them in our world of alpacas and their fleeces are adored by hand spinners as the appaloosa fleeces make a natural heathered yarn.

After all the appaloosa horse has become all the rage in the equestrian world and in the last few years the profile of the leopard spotted alpaca has increased tremendously. There are now appaloosa breeders in the USA, Australia and New Zealand with wonderful herd names like Rainbows End Alpacas, Painted Pine Alpacas, NZ Summerhill Alpacas and Wild Rose Suri Alpacas to name but a few. Initially it was the European breeders that took the most interest in Camouflage.

Popham Appaloosa Serengeti was Camouflage's first son. His mother was a white female with one brown spot behind her ear. He was sold to Alpakas vom Nieplitzhof in Germany and has been successfully standing at stud ever since. The same year Camouflage sired another boy called Popham Appaloosa Amboseli, also from a white female with a brown spot. He was very quickly snatched up and now stands at stud in Holland at Original of the Andes. Over the following few years the enquiries kept coming in from Europe with Appaloosa Harlequin going to going to Jabe Alpaca in Switzerland and Appaloosa Shadow to Ringwood Alpacas in Belgium. Appaloosa moved to Northern France last year.

During this time the UK market remained intrigued but would not commit. By now we were showing appaloosas in the show multi classes in the showing and depending on which judge was in the ring the animal would either do very well and be given a very encouraging reasoning which would include the word appaloosa, how popular they were abroad etc or the appy would be pushed to the bottom of the class with the reason given that there was no place for them in the industry!!

Finally, the UK market caught up and we started selling males into the UK. Connaught, Subterfuge to the north, Mardis Gras to Summerhaze Alpacas, Carnival and Busby to Amberly in Northern Ireland, Paintsplash to Mullacott Alpacas, and the latest is Appaloosa Helios to Sandhill Alpacas in Yorkshire.

What is an Appaloosa Alpaca? Little study has been done on appaloosa genetics in alpacas and I don't think anyone really knows. It is thought that the Appaloosa markings are the result of not one single gene but rather a complex string of genes. This string includes what is often referred to as the "Leopard Gene", which is responsible for the dark spotting and can be passed on in part or in full to any offspring. In horses, it is known that modifying genes form part of this string and must be present if the pattern is to be visible and it is likely that something similar occurs in alpacas. These modifying genes are responsible for the extent and amount of spotting that is seen - from a few spots to so many small spots that the animal has an almost roan appearance. My personal feeling, though not proven is that they are a rose grey with a spotting gene. This comes from the fact that most Camouflage's offspring display a varying amount of grey, normally in their top line and this increases as they age.



Grey evident especially in the top line.

This one characteristic, that is the evidence of the colour grey was also reported at the Alpaca 2012 Conference by Andy Merriweather who feels they are a variation of the harlequin grey.

A quick glance at the BAS registry will show that Camouflage has thrown 29 appys out of 59 progeny, this is a 49% success rate but I feel this flatters Camouflage somewhat. I know of four other progeny that are not appaloosas which would reflect a success rate more like 45%. The majority of his appie progeny have been brown/fawn spots on a white background with the grey top line but 2012 saw our first black spots on a brown background. This alpaca was mothered by a solid white female.



Appaloosa leg and nose



Camouflage 2019



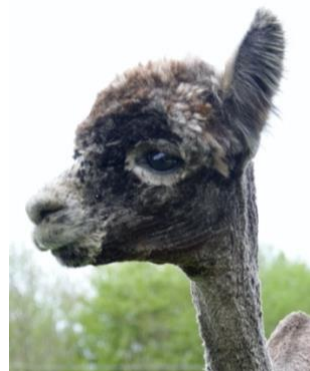
Camouflage with Harlequin and Shadow



Harlequin grey or appy?



Our favourite cria of 2019



Grey spots!

I have been asked on numerous occasions about a separate appaloosa class at shows. When asked this I always hesitate for two main reasons. How do we class them and I don't want empty appaloosa classes due to a lack of numbers? The latter will evolve itself as the numbers increase. The former is much more of a problem so I'm going to stick my neck out here and venture forward with a possible classification to qualify an alpaca for the appaloosa class.

Minimal Appaloosa

Spots apparent only on the blanket. The spots must be at least two colours apart on the colour chart from the base colour. This is measured against the skin. There must be a minimum of six spots which must be of at least one inch in diameter.

Classic Appaloosa

Spots spread across the body. The spots must be at least two colours apart on the colour chart from the base colour. This is measured against the skin. At least six of these spots must appear on the blanket and be of at least one inch in diameter.

Leopard Appaloosa

The spot/colour requirements are the same as the Classic but are much more plentiful and will even merge especially on the neck and be extensively distributed in the blanket.

At present our population of appaloosas stands at 10. Camouflage is now nearly 14 years old. We have our usual 6 or 7 females pregnant again to him this year but realise he is not going to carry on forever. Fortunately he produced a son this year that we have called Appaloosa Kaleidoscope who in our opinion is the best we have seen so the intention is to keep him on farm to replace Camouflage when he does eventually retire. We just need to keep finding the right females for him to go over to produce the wonderful appaloosa alpaca. That can be the hard bit!!