

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

This column was not submitted for publication because an overriding issue arose which I felt needed immediate addressing and thus a substitute column was prepared. The other issue is no longer an issue and is not included in this collection.

Public Relations

We enjoy our llamas and look forward to sharing our joy and knowledge with others. We frequently hear comments and/or are asked questions that reinforce our belief that too little has been done to educate the public about our beloved camelids. Although some questions we have been asked have been surprising, we have never felt at a loss for a response ... until this past week. We had a pre-school group visit our farm and the youngsters, for the most part, were more interested in playing in our sand pile than asking questions. However, one of the accompanying adults asked Jeanne and me if we were married. Having been married for forty-four years both Jeanne and I were stunned and did not immediately respond. We finally asked the individual to repeat the question. We are still not sure why the question was posed. Perhaps she was wondering if both members of a husband/wife team could share such an enthusiasm for llamas.

One of our two-year old llamas, Obi Wan Kenobe, is a much laid back llama and is excellent at PR. We brought him out and two of the youngsters took him (with Jeanne's assistance) for walks. What was most surprising to us was how straight, tall and proud Obi stood. His demeanor in the show ring is quite different. He clearly loves PR but hates being in the show ring.

Obi's behavior reminded us of another of our llamas, Túpac. When Túpac was Obi's age we had a great deal of concern about his self-image ... until we put a pack saddle on him. All of a sudden, he, too, stood straight, tall and proud and was anxious to strut his stuff. Several years have passed, Túpac now thinks he is hot stuff and we may well bring him back to the show ring next year.

We learned three things from this visit:

- no matter how well prepared you are, the public can sometimes surprise you,

- no matter how well you think you know your llamas, they can sometimes surprise you, and most importantly
- always have a sand pile available for young visitors.

Alarums and Excursions

One of the joys of having llamas is hearing the alarm call. We are in the habit of going out to see what our llamas have espied. More often than not our eyes are not up to the task, but we have seen amongst other things, several moose, many deer, an albino coyote and a neighbor's cat. As the years have passed the alarm calls have become less frequent as our llamas have become familiar with the wildlife that passes by our pastures, that is, they have become less frequent until this spring.

We have been hearing the alarm call at least several times a day for at least a month. Frequently the call has been given by Shady Lady. Shady is expecting her first cria this fall and we were wondering whether the hormonal change she is experiencing could have made her more sensitive to 'unusual events' in our pastures. The other llamas have treated Shady's calls with respect and have joined her at the fence line, which gave credence to her calls. Until several days ago we had not been able to discern a reason for the calls. Finally, I saw a wild turkey after hearing an early morning alarm call and we have since seen several more. We suspect a flock has moved into our woods and while they are well camouflaged to our eyes, they are quite visible to our llamas.

Several years back another of our llamas, Midnight, was prone to giving the alarm call several times a day. He had recently moved to our farm and was apparently miffed by the fact that our females were ignoring him. To gain their attention he would go to the fence line nearest their pastures and give forth with a long alarm call. While they did respond to his alarm calls for a few days, they soon tired of his behavior and

totally took no notice of him, at which point, his alarm calls ceased. I am happy to report that our females have forgiven Midnight for his inappropriate behavior and now find him quite charming.