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HUNGARIAN ALPACA BREEDERS

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Abstract

New World Camelids (guanaco, vicuna, llama, alpaca) origin in South-America. Then native Americans keep the alpacas because of it's meat, skin and fine wool. The alpaca fleece is internationally recognized as the one of the most luxurious wool in the world. It's warm, soft, lightweight, strong, durable and easy to colour it. Nowadays you can find them round the World, example Africa, Asia, Europe. In Hungary more and more people start to breed alpacas. The first breeder started the farm in 2008. They live in Jobaháza and they keep the huacaya type of the alpacas. The other breeder can find near Békéscsaba. They have the other type of the alpaca, the suri. They started the farm in 2010. There are some other breeders in Hungary, example in Mezőtúr, Balassagyarmat and Balatonszentgyörgy.

Keywords: alpaca, breeder, Hungary

INTRODUCTION

The New World camelids include four closely related species that can successfully interbreed: the wild guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*) and vicuna (*Vicugna vicugna*) and, the domesticated, lama (*Lama glama*) and alpaca (*Lama pacos*) (Mondini, 1995; Wernery, 2002). It's accepted that alpacas domesticated from the shyer, smaller vicuna (Bromage, 2011). The geographic origin of this species includes Peru, Bolivia and Chile (Morante, 2009). Alpacas are much smaller than llamas, they reaching 78-104 cm at the shoulder, weighing in at between 47-80 kg. The optimal body temperature is between 36.4 – 37.8°C. Alpacas life expectancy is round 20-25 years. (Jenkins, 2012; *Animals in schools*, 2008). Cria's (young alpaca's) weight at the birth is between 5-10 kg. In the first 24 hours most crias lose weight and later start gaining. Somtimes alpaca crias lose round 0.12 to 0, 25 kg in the first 24 hours of life. After 1 day, crias should gain the aforementioned weights daily. The cria's body temperature should be 37, 7 to 38.9 °C. (Youngquist, 2006).

There are two basic breeds of alpacas classified by fleece type: the huacaya and the suri. The huacaya fiber has a sheep-like woolliness, and the suri fiber is straighter with only a slight wave and is lustrous (Hoffman, 1995; IAA, 2000).

Alpacas are not pack animals, they selected for dense, long coat which cover legs and neck too. Usually people shear them in every year (Bromage, 2011). The fiber is flexible, easy to paint, soft and hypoallergenic. It caused the absence of lanolin and other oils in the fleece. Alpaca clothing is really comfortable to wear (Shim, 2003; *Internet I*).

In former times, alpacas could have been met with only in zoos in Hungary (Budapest, Szeged and Nyíregyháza). Lately, private persons have also purchased alpacas as a pet and not for economic purpose. Scilicet, people are not familiar with these animals, and many feel an



aversion for them. As there is no demand for sheep fleece, many people see no earthly reason for keeping alpacas. In spite of this, the first alpaca breeder popped up also in Hungary in 2008. In subsequent years, several others have followed his example. Presently, the alpaca herds are small-sized and can produce few fleeces annually in spite of the demand of the wool industry. Consequently, the producers can sell the alpaca fleece only at the price of the sheep fleece. Following below are introduced three alpaca farms of Hungary located at town Jobaháza, Békéscsaba and Bábolna, respectively.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

I met with the breeders personally, and I visited the farms. I asked them about the keeping, breeding and experiences with the animals. I noted down these informations and took pictures with camera about the alpacas and the different places.

RESULTS

Jobaháza

This alpaca farm was the first to be established in Hungary in 2008. The animals belonging into the Huancaya type of Alpaca were introduced from the Netherlands. Presently, 3 mares, 3 young mares and 3 males are kept in the farm. The aim of the breeders is to familiarise people with the alpaca and its breeding so as to popularise the species in the country. Therefore, on farm courses are held annually for the interested people to get knowledge about the behaviour of alpacas, their keeping and breeding, where alpaca owners can pool of technical experience (*Picture 1.*). Besides, the farm offers other services for the breeders. Such as is the import or sale of breeding or pet alpacas, their feedstuff, and fleece, as well as the covering and transportation of the animals. At Jobaháza, the run is partitioned to keep separately the mares from the males, and the stallions from each other. The same separation of animals is also possible within the boxes (*Picture 2.*); the floor is littered with straw. The alpacas are herded to graze on a pasture but as they nibble the grass off to the root, a piece of the pasture is let rest. Besides grazing, adult alpacas are given 150 g concentrate (150 g per head per day) and also some hay. Suckling mares are fed lucerne hay to improve their condition. Trimming of the toe nails is done at 3-month interval. Fleece is sheared in May.

In the year 2013, February they bought two tried males from Australian bloodline.

Picture 1.: Farm course
(photo: Prágai, 2012)



Picture 2. Separated alpacas
(photo: Prágai, 2012)



Békécsaba

The breeders had kept the Suri type of Alpaca on some hectares originally as a hobby. Their purposeful breeding began in 2010. The breeding aim is to shape a coloured herd (as this type is less frequent) and to improve fleece quality for sale. This goal can be realised by creating a pure bloodline and increasing the number of the herd to be sold for breeding or fancy purpose. In 2012, a mini herd comprising 4 mares, 2 males and 3 youngsters was kept in the farm. (The

first specimens of Alpaca had come from Chile). Alpacas are provided with 2 ha of pasture, where stallions are kept in separate runs to avoid rivalry. Newly foaled mares are also kept separately (*Picture 3.*). The same separation of animals is also possible within the boxes. The concrete floor is covered with polyethylene foam sheet (Polifoam) to keep animals warm and ensure their comfortable rest. The manure storage area is covered with straw enabling easy cleaning of the room. Mares usually foal in April-May; animals are sheared at this time. Trimming of the toe nails and teeth corrections are done parallel to shearing to minimise stress to the animals. Animals reside day-long in the run enabling their grazing at free access. Besides, they receive hay and complementary concentrate. The concentrate is compounded especially for alpacas and imported. Presently, the owners can sell the alpaca fleece to hand-workers at a lower price under compulsion.

Picture 3. Pasture for mares with foal
(photo: Prágai, 2012)



Bábolna

The mini herd of Huancaya type consists of 6 animals including already the progeny. Animals are kept as a hobby. The area and the run are under improvement so as to ensure suitable accommodation for the animals (e.g., to separate the males from the females) and provide the interested people with a spectacle. Since one half of the run is a part of the nearby arboretum the visitors may happen to see the alpacas as well. The breeding goal was to optimising the date of covering and foals to avoid winter foals caused a god deal of problems previously. In 2013 they made the pastures separately (*Picture 4.*); now they can control the breeding of alpacas.

Like other farms, the animals are day-long on the pasture without a fixed grazing season. As a general experience, alpacas do not graze the high grass but readily consume it mown down. Their other feeds include meadow hay, wheat, crushed corn, carrots, apple, sugar-beet, triticale, and salt lick. Trimming of the toe nails and teeth corrections are done parallel to shearing in May. In spring time animals are vaccinated against scabies, and in summer time they are protected from the mosquitoes using biological methods.

Picture 4. Male and female alpacas

(photo: Prágai, 2013)



Balassagyarmat

The huacaya type alpaca are kept as a hobby. There is one male, one female and one young (female) alpaca. The male live separately (*Picture 5.*). All animals are black coloured. Animals got hay (*Picture 6.*), grains, apples, and beetroot. The owner brings the alpacas on wool festivals. His aim to show, introduce these animals to people.

Picture 5. Separated male in the background

(photo: Prágai, 2012)



Picture 6. Hayrack
(photo: Prágai, 2012)



CONCLUSION

The alpacas get well acclimatised to the ecological conditions of Hungary. They consume readily the feedstuffs produced in the country. It is important to familiarise people with the alpaca and their benefits. The present herds cannot produce fleece in sufficient quantity saleable to the wool industry at a price equal to its quality. Expectedly, the more the breeder the higher the production of fleece and income will be.

Only minor, manageable problems of keeping and breeding have arisen among the alpaca breeders from lack of experience.

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