

Alpacas Don't Read the Book

2006 proved to be a challenging year for Forest Glen Alpacas. We had a lot of firsts here on our farm. We learned much and I wish to pass on some of the little tricks that worked for us.

If you are like us we try to plan the arrival of our crias when the weather is warm. So a cria due April 2nd here in northwestern PA is pushing it if one wants to hold to that philosophy. But in 2006 that was the way it was. It would be Jitterbug's first cria so we were extra watchful. I'm a big reader, so even though this was our 3rd birthing season, I got out the books again and read up. I felt sure the cria would be late so I prayed the weather would warm up. The 1st week of April was cold and rainy so I was glad she held on. The 2nd week was warm, sunny, and just beautiful. I tried to convince Jitterbug that now would be a great time to give birth, but she just wasn't listening. The books say that alpacas like to have their crias during the day and usually late morning to early afternoon. As the time gets closer the female is restless, eats less and may be off by herself. Well, I'm here to tell you that alpacas do not read the books!!

April 25th, the day was brisk with chances of rain. Jitterbug was acting a little restless but still stuffing her face at the hay feeder. Being usually mild tempered with her pasture mates, she was definitely cranky. So we watched her all day, taking turns walking out to the barn when she went out of view from our living room or garage windows. As the sun went down along with the temperature we still had no cria. Jitterbug was calmly eating hay as she had been all day. I went out to check on her at 10:00pm before I went to bed and there was no change. I truly felt, as I told my husband, there will be no cria tonight. Doug stayed up to watch the news as he usually does. He decided to go out to the barn one more time (11:30pm). It was a good thing he did!! He came running back in, woke me exclaiming we have a cria and it is 20 degrees out!! I grabbed the hairdryer and out we went. She had had the cria by the hay feeder and it was shivering and trying to stand. We brought them up to the barn, got the cria dried off and attempted to pen them in under the heat lamp. We got the cria coat that came with the kit and put it on the little one but his temp was still just 97 degrees. He was active but just would not stay under the lamp. I told Doug that he needed his own heat source, one that could travel with him. That was when Doug had the idea, why not use one of those thermo care heat pads that came as a sample in the mail a couple weeks ago. That was a great idea so in the house I ran. It had sticky strips on one side, so I stuck it to the underside of the cria coat, activated it, and put it back on the cria. The package said it would provide heat for 8 hours. I was not worried that it would get too hot since it was made to put on our bare skin, and of course the cria had fiber. It worked like a charm. The cria's temperature came up to 100 degrees within an hour. He was not stressed by being confined to just the little area under the lamp. He started nursing well and Jitterbug proved to be a great mom. She just didn't read the book!!

Our second cria was due May 9th. I told Doug that surely it would be warmer and we would not have to worry so much. Doug stayed home from the PAOBA Breeders Showcase because of course Amelia was late. It would be her first cria and we just did not feel comfortable both leaving. As anyone living in northwestern PA can attest to, May's weather was rain, rain, and more rain. May 24th came and I told Doug that Amelia was in labor. I know we will have a cria before nightfall since it was still early morning, she would have all day to work on it. That afternoon the sun came out and it was 55-60 degrees, perfect to give birth as I repeatedly told Amelia. After all, the book says they usually don't have long labors. She showed no signs that there was a serious problem. Amelia is much more high strung than Jitterbug and did not take

well to confinement or anything else the book says will aid in getting a healthy cria. So we decided to take turns coming out to check on her every hour all night long. At 1:30am Doug came running in saying we have a cria. This time it was 30 degrees out and the rain had stopped for the moment. We got the cria dried off and the coat put on with the thermo care attached. Again it worked well. We moved Amelia and her daughter in our heated shed that we had set up with a stall. We hoped to not be taken off guard like last time. But Amelia did not do well. She hated being confined and coupled with becoming a new mom she was just too agitated. While she nuzzled and hummed to her cria she would not stand still for her to nurse. We tried everything to calm her down, even just leaving and watching through the window. Finally, I felt the cria was laying down longer and longer so I decided to thaw out some of the colostrums I had stored. She readily took 3 ounces. It was amazing the energy boost that gave her. She again continued to try and nurse. By the next morning we could tell it just wasn't working. The weather was much improved, the sun was up and it was nice and warm. I came in exhausted to read up on anything else we could try. I literally knelt down on my kitchen floor and prayed. I asked God what I should do. The answer I got was do nothing!! Leave it all to nature. So I went back out and told Doug we have to just put her back with the herd and just let them be. I told him we weren't getting anywhere anyway, what could it hurt. So we put them back. The first thing Amelia did was race to the other end of the pasture without her cria. I thought to myself, Oh Great now we will be bottle feeding!! But we stayed out and just watched. The next thing we saw was just amazing. Amelia turned and called her daughter to her. She led her around the pasture as if showing her around. We watched as she slowly stood and allowed her to nurse. Amelia was turning out to be a great mom. Her cria was active and doing well.

I've learned that while we can do all the reading and provide everything the books tell us, the alpacas do not read and will do what is right for them. So the two rules my husband has written on the chalkboard in our barn for all the alpacas to read:

1. Think Pink
2. Have your cria during the daylight hours

Will not sway their thinking. Both crias are doing well and can be seen on our website www.forestglenalpacas.com Look for Little Cesar and Cleopatra.

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