

THE GUARDIAN ALPACA

Alpacas are, by nature, a herd animal. They are happiest with other alpacas where they quickly work out their 'pecking order' and social groups. The females are doting mothers. Both females and males are very protective of each other and especially of their young.

Nevertheless, alpacas adapt quickly to new surroundings and it is becoming common place to see alpacas in a flock of sheep where they are proving invaluable as protectors of their 'adopted herd'.

There is no doubt as to the hardy disposition of alpacas. Despite their quiet and friendly nature, they have survived the harshest of weather conditions in the Andean Mountains of South America. It was here that they developed the instincts which enable them to fend off predators.

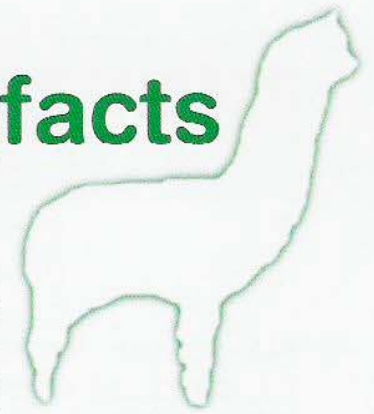


Alpacas are very alert, with excellent eyesight. A loud distress or warning call quickly sees the adults in a herd encircle the young to protect them from approaching danger. Much to the intruder's surprise, the assertive leaders then approach with great speed, stomping, kicking, spitting or biting which soon gets the message across and sees the intruder fleeing for cover.

Advantages of using alpacas

Alpacas develop the same protective instincts and behaviours in a flock of sheep. Ewes and lambs are kept together with the alpacas constantly on alert, patrolling and protecting.

alpacafacts



The problem of lamb losses to foxes can be solved by simply putting two mature alpacas in with the ewes a few weeks before lambing and leaving them there until weaning.

While running with the sheep, alpacas need no special attention. Fencing suitable for sheep is more than adequate for alpacas. Pasture needs are similar to sheep.



There is increasing acceptance and acknowledgment of the effectiveness of alpacas for protecting sheep flocks. Some farmers have recorded improved lambing rates from the low 80% to more than 100%. In SA's Mid North, farmers have recorded a better than 100% lambing rate "for the first time ever".

Goat breeders have also reported a decrease in the number of kids lost to predators when alpacas are run with the herd during kidding season.

And when not on guardian duty they can provide much pleasure and enjoyment as farmyard companions.

Mature male alpacas, suitable for the role as guardians, will cost a fraction of the value of the lambs and kids they will save. Considering their low maintenance costs, the fact they live for 15 to 20 years, and the dramatic increase in lambing or kidding rates, this investment can be quickly recovered.