



ALPACA

ARTIODACTYLA
Family: Camelidae
Genus: *Vicugna*
Species: *pacos*



Range: Andes Mts. of S Peru, N Bolivia, and N Chile

Habitat: High plateaus, open windswept areas of scarce vegetation and little water much of the year. Elevations between 11,480 and 18,860 feet above sea-level.

Niche: terrestrial, diurnal, herbivorous

Wild diet: scrub and scattered bush of little nutritive value, occasionally richer grassy foliage.

Zoo diet: alfalfa, hay, grain and salt

Life Span: (Wild) N/A
(Captivity) 20 years

Sexual dimorphism:

Location in SF Zoo: Children's Zoo Barnyard

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Alpaca are a domesticated breed of South American ungulates derived from the wild vicuña and is the smallest member of the camel family. They do not have a hump and resemble a sheep in appearance but are larger in size and have a long erect neck with long legs. Their body is slender, they have a cleft upper lip and their incisors are always growing and have enamel only on one side. Vicuñas are known for their long, very fine, and yet strong wool, which makes exceptionally soft and warm cloth. The alpaca's thick but soft coat is a special adaptation that traps layers of warm air close to its body so it can tolerate the freezing temperatures. They differ from the llama in that they are more slender in their proportions with a slightly shorter head with slightly longer ears.

Weight: 73 -143 lbs
HRL: 4.75 - 5.25 ft
TL: 6 in
SH: 29.5 - 33.5 ft

Alpaca are very sure-footed and graceful and run with a swinging stride as the front and hind legs move in unison on each side of the body. Each foot of the llama has only two digits (the third and fourth), which are padded and spread nearly flat while on the ground. This adaptation makes it possible for alpacas to tolerate walking on rough terrain. Alpaca are able to thrive at high altitude in the Andes as their blood has more red corpuscles than most mammals and their hemoglobin is more efficient in transporting oxygen to the tissues. They have a three-chambered stomach and are ruminators. This allows maximum extraction of nutrients from low-quality forages. They have no top teeth in the front.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

No llamas live independently of humans in their habitat.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Alpacas hum which is often a comfort noise. When threatened, they will make sharp, noisy inhalations, put their ears back, twist their heads and necks backwards toward the perceived threat, screaming, threatening to spit or kick. When males fight they scream a warbling bird-like cry, presumably intended to terrify the opponent.

Vicuñas live in family-based groups made up of a male, and 5 to 15 females and their young. Alpacas are social herd animals. They use a communal dung pile, where they do not graze. This behaviour tends to limit the spread of internal parasites. Generally, males have much tidier, and fewer dung piles than females who tend to stand in a line and all go at once. One female approaches the dung pile and begins to urinate and/or defecate, and the rest of the herd often follows.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Female llamas are induced ovulators. Female llamas do not go into "heat" or have an estrus cycle. A male in the act of mating or hoping for the chance will "orgle". This is a guttural vocal sound during copulation, which helps put the female in the mood and helps her to ovulate. A single birth (young called cria) occurs with the precocial foal able to run soon after birth. After a female gives birth, she is generally receptive to breeding again after about two weeks.

Estrous: induced ovulator	
Gestation: 11 – 11 1/2 mos	Sexual Maturity: M 3 yrs, F 16 – 18 mos
# of Mammae: 2 pair	Weaning Age: 6 mos
# of Young: 1	Weight at birth: 20 – 30 lbs

MISCELLANEOUS

Like the guanaco, it will frequently lick calcareous stones and rocks, which are rich in salt, and it will also drink salt water.

Fossil evidence shows that alpacas originated in North America, but were then forced to migrate into South America during the Ice Ages. Alpacas were domesticated, about 5,500 years ago, by the Incans, who wove royal robes from their wool. They are not used as beasts of burden like llamas but are valued only for their wool.

For alpacas, spitting results in what is called "sour mouth". Sour mouth is characterized by a loose-hanging lower lip and a gaping mouth. This is caused by the stomach acids and unpleasant taste of the contents as they pass out of the mouth.

Sources:

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Walker's Mammals of the World Vol 11 © 1999 Ronald M. Nowak, Johns Hopkins University Press, pgs 1072-1077

<http://www.alpacainfo.com/>

<http://www.ilovealpacas.com/>

<http://lazoo.org/>