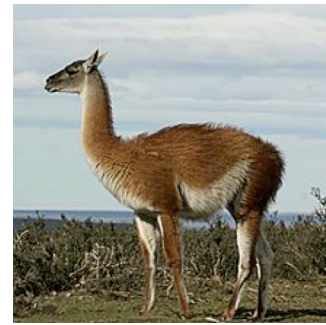




Guanaco
ARTIODACTYLA
Family: Camelidae
Genus: Lama
Species: guanicoe



Range: Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, and Argentina

Habitat: Arid and semi-arid mountainous regions including elevations up to 13,000'

Niche: terrestrial, diurnal, herbivorous

Wild diet: grasses, shrubs, herbs, flowers, lichens, fungi, and cacti

Zoo diet:

Life Span: (Wild) 20 – 25 years

(Captivity) 28 – 33 years

Sexual dimorphism: M larger than F

Location in SF Zoo: Puente al sur

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Guanacos are slender animals with pale brown backs, white undersides, short tails, large heads, very long necks, and big, pointed ears. They have a thick, woolly coat that can be light brown, brownish yellow, or a rusty red. Their belly, rump, and the backs of the long legs are usually white; the head, ears, and nape of the neck are gray. These colors help the guanaco blend in with its grassland and desert habitats. To protect its neck from harm, the guanaco has developed thicker skin on its neck. Guanacos have large eyes with thick lashes to protect them from dust and dirt kicked up by heavy winds. They have two padded toes on each foot that help with footing on rocky trails or gravel slopes. Their feet are best described as “squishy”. Their upper lip is split in two and can be used like fingers to help draw in food. The guanaco lick all the nutrients and dew from desert cacti. They are ruminants with a three-chamber stomach. Guanacos don't need to drink any water, getting all the moisture they need from the food they eat.

Hemoglobin of guanacos has a greater affinity for oxygen and their blood contains more red blood cells allowing them to tolerate the low oxygen levels found at higher altitudes. To survive in harsh, dry climates, guanacos have a remarkable ability to conserve water and, like other camels, can obtain moisture from the plants they eat. Guanacos are excellent runners, reaching speeds of 35 miles per hour. Guanacos are also strong swimmers and are comfortable standing or lying in mountain streams. The Guanaco has coarse guard hair and soft undercoat, which is comparable to the best cashmere.

Wt: 200-300 lbs
HRL:
TL:
SH: 3.5 - 4 ft

STATUS & CONSERVATION

During the past century, guanaco populations have declined by nearly 95 percent and become highly fragmented due to poaching, competition with sheep for food, and habitat degradation by sheep and other livestock. Some ranchers kill guanacos because they believe they transmit harmful diseases to sheep. Early explorers described long-distance migrations by huge herds, but now guanacos are mostly sedentary, confined by fences, livestock, and hunting. They are listed as least concern on the IUCN red list.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Guanacos also communicate through vocalizations. Their sounds range from high-pitched trills to snorting and shrieking: they need to alert the herd to any possible danger approaching. Guanacos also use their dung piles to mark territory boundaries.

Most guanacos live in herds composed of females, their young and a dominant male. Bachelor males form a separate herd of as many as 50 males. They tend to run as a group when threatened by predators such as mountain lions, and can spit up to a distance of 6 feet, with great aim. When they feel threatened, guanaco alert the herd to flee with a high-pitched bleating call.

Environmental conditions determine group composition after the breeding season ends. Populations are sedentary and breeding males defend their feeding territories year round, though females may leave to form winter groups of 10 to 90 individuals, when the winters are mild and forage supply is stable. If drought or snow cover reduces food availability, guanacos form mixed-sex herds of up to 500 individuals and travel to more sheltered or food-abundant areas.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Mating season occurs between December and January, during which males often fight violently to establish dominance and breeding rights. Males are polygynists and mate with several females. Females wait to become pregnant until environmental conditions seem right. They give birth every other year to a single calf during the summer months, which are November to December in South America. Females give birth at about the same time so the babies have a greater chance of survival. Baby guanacos, or chulengos, are precocial and able to run soon after birth and begin grazing within a few weeks. Male chulengos are chased off from the herd at approximately one year of age.

Estrous: seasonal; one breeding season/year	
Gestation: 11 mos	Sexual Maturity: F 2 yrs, M 2–4 yrs
# of Mammae: 2 pair	Weaning Age: 4 - 8 mos
# of Young: 1	Weight at birth: 10% of mothers weight ~ 20 lbs

MISCELLANEOUS

Guanacos are considered to be the wild ancestor of the domesticated llama. Guanacos and vicunas are wild animals, but llamas and alpacas have been domesticated. . Guanacos are smaller than domestic llamas but larger than alpacas and vicunas.

The Tehuelches, a nomadic, pre-colonial people who once lived in Patagonia, depended on guanacos for meat and wool, and followed migrating herds.

Sources:

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