

LOVER BOY'S LEG

by Laura Harrawood
Show Me State Minis

This article should probably come with a caution warning for those folks who lean towards a weak stomach. Most people sit when they read anyway but if words like pus, exudate, drainage and suppuration make you queasy then it's probably especially important to sit in this case.

In September of '07 we were getting our mini llama "Lover Boy" ready for his first ALSA show. We noticed a patch of dusty, caked dirt on his rear leg so we soaked it with water to soften it for easier removal. Some of the dirt came off but with Lover Boy's dancing and tail swishing it became pretty apparent that this was not just dirt. My sister, Joanne, and I cut the hair around this dirt and once the hair was cut free we were able to remove a "cap" from a wound about 2 inches long. After this cap came off, a cottage cheese like pus was evident. After pushing around on the area surrounding the wound we were able to get more pus out and when we couldn't get any more we cleaned up the wound with mild soap and water, put on fly repellent and watched it..... Obviously we weren't going to the ALSA show....

We were pretty proud of ourselves after we saw how good the wound looked and we checked it daily. We could see that it was healing really quickly. Just what we wanted.... right?

Well a couple of weeks later this wound opened up with a vengeance and let loose a string of white exudate. Now the wound on Lover Boy's leg looked bigger. He let us clean it up again and cut even more hair off



the surrounding skin for cleanliness sake. You have to question your own sanity if you are satisfied and repulsed at the same time you squeeze pus from a wound. We cleaned it up every day and now flushed it with saline at every wound examination. Once again we did a good job and the wound healed up nicely.

In November when this wound opened up yet again, we asked our vet to come see it with us. Our vet is a wound addict and admits to loving wet labs at the veterinarian conferences. She cleaned the wound and explored it for any foreign objects. Not finding any she was hopeful that just by roughing it up maybe it would promote healing from the inside out.

It healed beautifully.... this is one tough llama.

The next time it opened up after a strenuous 2 days of packing we decided to take Lover Boy into the veterinarians office. The plan was to sedate him and do a thorough examination with wound debridement. Our vet opened up the wound, removed some necrotic tissue,

inserted a drain and put a couple of sutures in it to keep it shut. Our job (Joanne, my nephew Ben and me) was to irrigate the wound twice a day with a dilute Nolvasen solution. This was supposed to keep the skin from healing before the inside of the wound was healed and to prevent infection. After 2 weeks it looked like we had been making progress but it sort of stalled. Since Joanne and I are nurses, we know a wound care nurse who we refer to as "The Wound Wizard". She suggested we change from Nolvasen to a Dakin's solution and our vet agreed. Dakin's solution is a homemade concoction that includes bleach and baking soda that we cook up on the stove.... really. It was used extensively in WW I as an antiseptic.

So now every day, twice a day we are irrigating the wound. The penrose drain was removed after 3 weeks so in order to keep the skin from closing we started packing the openings with gauze soaked in Dakin's. Here's the tricky part.... we have to get wet gauze... Oh, clean wet gauze pushed into a tiny hole in a wound that hurts, on a llama leg that is searching for a face to kick.

We decided that dealing with draining wound tracts is a sport best practiced in the winter months. One of the only things that could have made this whole ordeal worse would have been a maggot or two. We said it more than once during the months we treated Lover Boy's leg that we were glad he was a mini llama. Every day we asked

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each other if the wound was getting better.... I mean it looked better!

Needless to say we were all getting very very tired of this Lover Boy's leg business. After improvement stagnated and a new type of purulent drainage emerged from the wound, the team (Joanne and me) cultured this new drainage and brought it to the University of Missouri-Columbia, which is a Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.



I brought a piece of pus covered gauze in a sterile container to UMC to Dr. Dusty W. Nagy, DVM, PhD. Dr Nagy came out of a back room with a smile on her face and a quick sure stride. Dr Nagy is nothing but fearless by any standards. She walked right up, took the lid off the container that held the piece of gauze and smelled it hard. I tried not to look horrified because I am a nurse. I have a hair trigger gag reflex though, and tend to sneak up on potentially foul smelling articles. I knew that given ½ a chance this woman could command armies.... maybe even countries for that matter. The gauze did grow some harmful bugs but even with this news Dr. Nagy suggested an x-ray because she thought maybe we were dealing with a sequestrum. Yes, a sequestrum. This is a bone fragment which drifts away, for a variety of reasons, from the live bone and dies. The body then



tries to rid itself unsuccessfully of this dead bone and creates a draining wound tract to the outside of the body. Apparently some abscesses on jaws are actually sequestrums. So an x-ray was indeed taken. A sequestrum was indeed found. Dr. Nagy did surgery to remove the dead bone and Lover Boy's leg healed up and haired over.

A couple of weeks ago someone asked Joanne and me if Lover Boy's leg was better. At the exact same time we both said, "we hope".



When To Hold ‘Em And When Best To Fold ‘Em

By Cathy Spalding

Spitting would seem to be among the higher levels of aggression exhibited within the normal alpaca and llama behavioral range. Humans often miss-understand or altogether miss the behaviors leading up to a true stomach contents spit. An alpaca or llama can easily manipulate our human fear of receiving spit by simply snapping ears back and very slightly raising the nose. “Oh no... they are going to spit!” As if by magnetic repulsion, we move back hoping for the moment to pass.

Spit is not something to be given – nor received – lightly. It is serious business. The alpaca or llama who would spit does not seem to enjoy the doing of it any more than those who would be on the receiving end. Animals not directly involved in the exchange will tend to avoid anything with spit on it and some might even hang their own lower lip. It is as nasty to the alpacas and llamas as it appears to be for humans.

After a good stomach contents spit, an alpaca or llama will open their mouth to “air out.” This stance is commonly called “bad mouthing.” They appear miserable with bits of greenish stomach contents dripping from their mouth. The lower lip hangs loosely and the ears are usually hanging at half-mast. Nostrils can flare and there may be mouth and/or irregular breathing. While the lower lip hangs limply downward, the eyes may appear somewhat dull and distant showing some disconnect with their surroundings. There are often signs of tension and tightening in the facial muscles with a skin wrinkle appearing directly below the eye. In this offensive and rather disgusting state, they are normally left quite to themselves by the rest of the herd.

It is not unusual to see an alpaca or llama that has just hurled a good

stomach contents spit wander about his environment looking for anything that might help rid their mouth of this disdainful mess. In search of a “breath mint,” they may chew on the bark of a tree or wooden fence rail, leaves, sticks or head directly for any available fir bow. Some have even been seen picking up and mouthing rocks. In this state, it is not typical that they will seek out their usual hay or grain or even drink water.

There are different levels of spit. Alpacas and llamas may spit out a large volume of air complete with saliva. Spit may be composed of whatever was in the mouth at the time of the incident such as grass, hay, grain or cud. These spits can be somewhat spontaneous in the midst of an argument or in the form of making a statement. These spits will also happen with little to no warning.

The highest level of spit aggression – serious and vile – is the stomach contents spit. The contents of this spit are actually called up from the stomach. Alpacas and llamas normally go through a series of behavioral warnings prior to actually spitting stomach contents. Truth be, they would hope to avoid giving this type of spit as much as any recipient would hope to avoid receiving it. The ears snap back, the nose rises and if the “offender” does not respond appropriately, the nose goes higher and the ears move to the pinned position. If the “offender” still does not respond appropriately, you will see a significant lump travel upward along the neck. Sometimes that goopy lump is halted and held in the mouth for just one more warning. Often,

however, it is not halted and the lump is forcefully spewed forth in the direction of the “offender.”

Alpacas and llamas are unable to retrieve and spit fresh stomach contents in one continuous action unless the nose is raised high which in turn allows the ears to be pinned back (cued) nearly in line with the neck. This physical posturing effectively diminishes any dramatic curves – particularly at the throat -- thus facilitating a fairly straight path from the stomach, up the esophagus and out the mouth. Thinking of this physical positioning in human terms, if we were about to regurgitate and did not stretch out our neck, what would happen?



The photo above captures just how miserable an alpaca can feel immediately following a stomach contents spit. Llamas feel just as miserable. The lower lip is drooping, the ears hang at half-mast and

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Cathy Spalding

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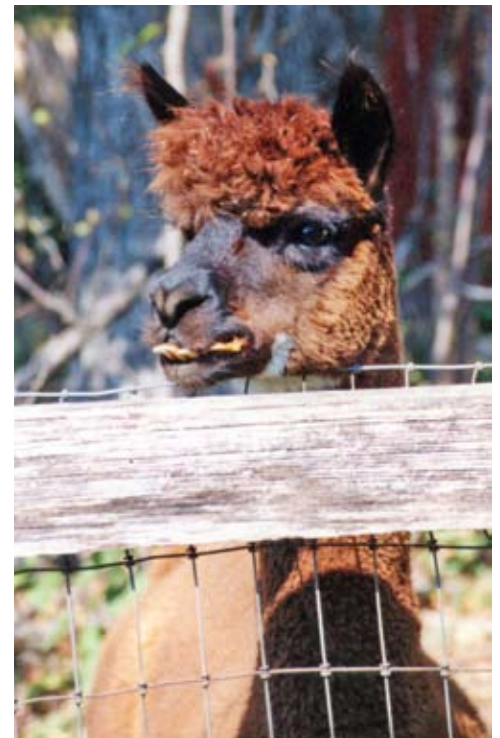
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the nostrils are somewhat flared. Notice the look in the eye and the sagging eyelids. There is an appearance of disconnect to the surroundings as this alpaca seems to focus on how she is feeling at the moment.

In the next photos, a male alpaca has chosen a leaf as a sort of “breath mint” after a stomach contents spit. In the first photo, he has just secured the leaf. He still looks miserable. His lower lip is drooping, his nostrils are flared, his ears hang at half-mast and his eyes are dulled with eyelids sagging. He appears a bit withdrawn and disconnected from his surroundings.

In the second photo of this same alpaca a short time later, notice that he is beginning to perk up. Still in recovery, he continues to hold the leaf in his mouth. However, he is feeling much better. His lower lip is beginning to return to a more proper positioning and



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his ears have come forward. His nostrils do not appear flared. His eyes and overall body stance now appear more interested and connected with his surroundings.

We can learn a great deal by closely observing a potentially serious stomach contents spit situation with our animals.



The white alpaca is quite serious in her statements to the fawn alpaca. So serious, in fact, that she would appear just moments from backing it up with a hearty spit of stomach contents. Notice her body language and the combination of cues coming together for this expression of anger or upset. The neck is outstretched,

the nose is up and the ears are nearly pinned. While not looking straight on at her opponent, she is looking more directly than the recipient. She is not quite yet lined up physically in a balanced body position for a good stomach contents spit. She is, however, surely warning that it is a definite possibility.

Notice the recipient of her aggression. She is well aware of the situation but for the moment has decided to lower her head and look away. Her eyes are drooped and she shows signs of muscle tension in her face. Her body is out of balance. Her combined behavioral stances come together to give her a softer and more subordinate look.

Moments later, the situation has escalated. The white alpaca has shifted herself to a near front on position and balanced herself fairly squarely on all fours. She has brought her neck up, pinning her ears and straightening her esophagus. She has not yet spit but is at the ready needing only to perhaps lift her nose slightly higher. It would appear the recipient would still hope to avoid an all out confrontation. While moving closer into a defensive spit position by raising her nose, she remains off balance. In fact, she has not even moved her feet. While she has raised her nose, her neck remains lowered in a more submissive position and she does not make eye contact with her aggressor. Even so, she has escalated and lost some of her softer, more subordinate look. While certainly aware of the situation, the other alpacas are not getting involved.



It is interesting to consider the so often-heard advice: "Don't look them in the eye." Alpacas and llamas look at one another constantly. We look at them... they look back... nothing happens. In understanding alpaca and llama behavior, perhaps we can take our cue for the instance when it is likely not appropriate for us to look them in the eye. The recipient in this potential spit match is surely providing the cues for us. When an alpaca or llama is moving into a stomach contents spit posturing, it seems wise to soften our body, perhaps turn sideways to them and, in this particular instance, it seems clear... "Don't look them in the eye!"

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