



FLOWERDALE ESTATE ALPACAS

Alpaca Articles: Fleece

UNUSUAL COLOUR PATTERNS.

Over the five years in which I have been researching the colour genetics of alpacas, I have been “collecting” records of unusual colour patterns, sent to me by many breeders. I suspect there are many more out there, which are disguised by the somewhat restrictive descriptions available for registration. Indeed, some defy description altogether!

The “Appaloosa” Pattern.

In particular, I have become interested in the “appaloosa” pattern, that is, an alpaca with many spots on a different coloured background. Usually these are white with coloured spots, but I have a record of a dark fawn coloured alpaca with white spots on both sides, giving it a distinct “Bambi” look.



photo 1

However, one of the most unusual families I have come across is right in my own backyard, so to speak. My agister/manager has a medium brown, apparently solid coloured female, which has produced three “appaloosa” type crias from different males. None of the males has reproduced any spotting patterns in other matings, so they must be coming from the female, but she does not appear to have much in her background that could be linked to these odd patterns. Her first cria was born white with distinctive red spots all over his face and on his body. He looked as though he was born with measles! (Photo 1.) Over several months, this cria began to darken to an ashy, greyed fawn shade down the neck, and initially it was thought that he was rubbing his neck against a burnt out stump and getting dirty. By the time he was shorn, his fleece could be separated into three different shades of fawn, and he was white no longer.

(Photo 2.)



photo 2

This mating was repeated, and a female cria, also white with similar spots was born, but unfortunately both youngsters were killed in a dog attack shortly afterwards. The next cria from this dam was a female of a curious golden shade of fawn with smoky dark points. (Photo 3.) By her first shearing she also had darkened to an ashy light brown, with several small dark spots found on her belly. (Photo 4.) It is the latest cria, however, a full sister to the golden one, which has taken us completely by surprise, born a light honey fawn with black spots all over her face and down her legs. (Photo 5.) At weaning, her fleece when parted shows a deep ashy grey at the skin, while the outside of her fleece is still honey fawn in colour. (Photo 6.)



photo 3



FLOWERDALE ESTATE ALPACAS

How will the judges/officials classify “appaloosas”?

I also have two white “appaloosas”, which have extremely white fleece, with skin covered in black pigment spots, which grows black fibre. The young male was registered as white/black, and his spots are so small they do not show up by just looking at him. However, once the fleece is parted, the black is easily seen running through the white. I re-registered him as a roan, and took him to a show to see what the officials would make of him. He was passed by the Chief Steward as a roan/rosegrey, but he generated a great deal of comment from other breeders as to his exact colour, the best comment being “Well, I think he’s a bad white!” In fact, they are both genetically black alpacas, which have been overwhelmed by the extreme action of at least one and probably more white-spotting genes.



photo 4

The female has had four crias to date, two of which have been white “appaloosas” like her; one was a typical “multi” with a black saddle and white legs, and one was nearly solid black except for a small white mark on the face. (Photo 7.)



photo 5

It will be an interesting exercise to mate the two appaloosas and see what happens. There is the distinct possibility of them producing a solid black cria. (Maybe we should call them “alpacaloosas”!)

Another unusual colour pattern, is the alpaca which has a black head and legs, and even underbelly, but which has a grey saddle. I have photographic records of three separate alpacas like this, and another confirmed report of a group of three females, apparently mother, daughter and granddaughter, with the same pattern.



photo 6

They are quite different to the look of a typical grey alpaca by the way, and are called “black-headed roan” in the US. One US breeder was advertising a stud male of this pattern, but there were no progeny records available at the time.

From the information that I have, this pattern appears to develop over time. The first female, born solid black, began to go grey by about 2 years of age, and by about 8 years, she appears quite grey except for her black face, legs and underbelly. (Photo 8), unshorn & (Photo 9), shorn. One of the other two on record is also about 2 years old and is going grey in the same way. The other one is thought to be about 18 years old, with very grey saddle but still has very black head, neck and legs.



FLOWERDALE ESTATE ALPACAS

It is interesting to note that you don't always get a "blend" of parents. Sometimes a sire will produce the same pattern in several progeny from different mothers, and sometimes a particular mother will produce a clone of herself, no matter what she is mated to! Breeders have commented that they have mated the same pair of alpacas, several times, and each time got a different looking progeny. I have a white-faced, spotted grey female, which mated three times to the same solid black sire, produced two white-faced, spotted greys almost identical to her, in colour and placement of spots, and a solid black cria which was the image of his father. The black cria will never throw white-faced spotted greys, because he just didn't get those genes from his mother for them. Same-pair records are particularly important, as what you have is a "litter" situation, just spread over several years instead of the progeny being all in one litter like dogs or cats. A litter simply reflects more quickly, the genetic make-up of the parents.

Observing and recording changes in coloured patterns.

If you think you have an unusual coloured alpaca, the first thing to do is photograph it. (I am a "photographoholic", as my friends know!) Take the photo preferably at or just after birth; and then progressively at least up to first shearing, with a before and after shot. (Make sure you take one before they find something to roll in!) It is also necessary to record at least the mother and any other siblings or family members available. It all helps to determine their genetic make-up.

The topic of colour inheritance in alpacas continues to be a fascinating one, and I am always interested in odd or unusual colour patterns. I can be contacted as below.

Elizabeth has made an exhaustive study of colours in Australian alpacas. She has published a book "The Alpaca Colour Key" which forms the notes for her seminar and includes 10 pages of full colour photographs. \$30 plus \$5 P&P Australia wide. Overseas, please contact Elizabeth. "The Alpaca Colour Key Seminar" – is available as a one day, full colour laptop presentation to regions/groups.

For more information on colour inheritance in alpacas:
CONTACT: Elizabeth Paul at: erehwonalpacas@hotmail.com or
Phone/fax 03 9890-7741.

Article written by Elizabeth Paul – Erehwon Alpacas



photo 7



photo 8