
Alpaca

Vicugna paco

Class: *Mammalia*

Order: Artiodactyla

Family: *Camelidae*

Characteristics:

Alpacas are the smallest of the domestic South American camelids. Alpacas are slender in appearance with either a thick, tight, curled hair on the body with shorter hair on the legs or thick non-curly hair. They can have up to 22 different colors in their coats ([FABA](#)). The hair is very soft and silky, most likely artificially selected. Their teeth are similar to camelids, meaning they lack front, upper teeth (incisors) but have a strong upper gum ([Alpacas of Montana](#)).

Behavior:

Alpacas are social animals, living in large groups of up to 20 individuals. They communicate using a variety of calls. They often show frustration with higher toned calls and may spit on those they see as threatening or annoying. Alpaca herds will excrete waste products in one central location.

Reproduction:

Alpacas are induced ovulators, meaning that the act of copulation will cause the ovary to release an egg 24 hours afterwards. The female is no longer receptive to the male when ovulation occurs. Gestation can last anywhere between 240 to 360 days. Most of the time, the female will give birth to one cría (Spanish for baby animal) during the rainy season.

Diet:

Wild: Grasses and Woody shrubs

Zoo: Hay and access to salt licks

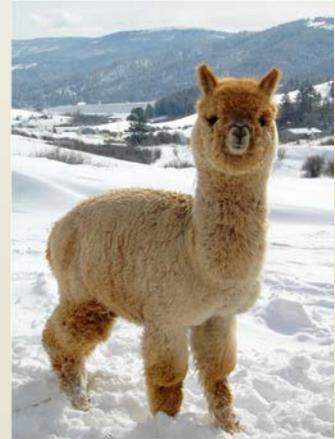
Conservation:

Llamas and alpacas can interbreed. Since alpacas and llamas are often found together, there are worries that the pure alpaca breed might be lost to hybrids.

FYI:

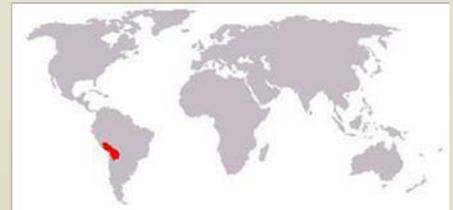
- Based on mitochondrial DNA, alpacas were domesticated from vicuñas while llamas were domesticated from guanacos ([Kadwell et al 2001](#)).

- Crías have been known to wonder the herd and try to nurse from other females. They either respond by allowing it, walking away, or spitting on the young.



Range & Habitat:

No established wild populations of alpacas.



Found in the high mountains of Peru and Bolivia.

Lifespan: up to 20 years in captivity, 5 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: Valued for thick wool.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Not Evaluated

