

Your llamas or alpacas are grazing peacefully in the field and the new vet shows up—the one that charges by the hour! You must move the animals into the barn and time is a wasting. Is the herding process more of a chase? Is there yelling and running involved? When the llamas/alpacas are finally in the barn are you so frustrated you'd like to give the shots yourself with a dull needle!

Herding effectively is a combination of understanding camelid behavior as well as setting up your facilities to support your efforts. Thankfully llamas and alpacas like to stick together and herd naturally, however a big tree in the wrong place can turn the potentially simple process of getting a few llamas or alpacas in a barn into a hour long nightmare.

As a trainer I have an interest in herding from two perspectives. It is very difficult to work with an llama or alpaca unless it is confined. So we must get the llamas or alpacas from the field to a catch pen. Secondly, from a pure training point of view herding is deceptively important. Herding effectively is one of the first and most important ways that you demonstrate your leadership. If the herding process allows your llamas or alpacas to run the show, ignore your direction and frustrate your efforts then you are teaching them to manipulate you and subvert your authority. If, on the other hand herding your animals is a calm orderly event you come off as the safe, trusted leader that makes being with you easy.

Obviously the best of all possible worlds is to call your llamas or alpacas "llamas or alpacas" and have them come charging willingly into the barn lining up by height or alphabetically. I recommend teaching your llamas or alpacas to come to a specific word that you associate with food and then give them food when they come. You may be able to get away with calling and not producing occasionally however putting out even a token amount of food will make points with the less trusting members of your herd. I also recommend that you avoid creating a calling pattern. Call the llamas or alpacas in at two in the afternoon and ten at night and give them food when you do it. Then you won't be faced with a group of llamas or alpacas looking at their watches and shaking their little heads when you holler the magic LLAMA's at the wrong time of day.

Try as you might there are those times when for some reason your llamas or alpacas won't come when called. In this case good herding techniques will serve you well. A single handler alone should be able to move animals decisively from place to place in a calm orderly manner without making three trips around the pasture. A good herder can keep the animals together without provoking movement faster than a trot. So how do you get from horrendous herding to harmonious herding.

First of all design or change your facility to support organized herding. Use lane ways, funnels and "airlocks"—holding areas with two gates. Gates are best placed in corners you can use the adjacent fence line as one boundary as you herd the group to the gate. In general it is easier to herd a group of animal along a fence line to a gate even if it isn't the shortest route. A piece of flat 1-2 inch wide nylon webbing tied to a corner post creates an easy and effective funnel to help move animals without putting up permanent fencing. Pick up the loose end of the webbing walk out into the pasture and wrap the webbing around the group, herding them into the desired opening as you go (pay attention to herding angles mentioned later as you do this). Avoid building unnecessary narrow openings or placing gates near a single big tree or other obstacle. Llamas or alpacas can get very cagey about using an obstacle such as this to foil all

efforts at herding them through a gate. Each and every door should have a way of being closed. There is nothing more frustrating than getting all the llamas or alpacas in the desired spot and not being able to keep them there. I can remember visiting one ranch that had several small doors into the barn rather than one big door. This feature was designed to cut down on drafts to the barn-in a cold climate a very good idea. The problem was these small openings had no closure. It was impossible to herd the animals into the barn even though they were in a very small pasture. We would herd the animals in one door only to have them cut across the barn and run gleefully out another. It took three people to herd the animals into the barn.

In order to herd llamas or alpacas effectively it is very important to understand the effect of your body position on a single llama or group of llamas or alpacas. Llamas or alpacas will instinctively orient themselves so that they have a forward escape route relative to any perceived threat. When you first approach a group of llamas or alpacas they will raise their heads and look at you. Once an individual animal or the group has made the decision to move (based on your distance from them) they will orient their bodies to keep you behind them. Like it or not when you walk out to the pasture intending to herd your llamas or alpacas you become a bit of a threat and the llamas or alpacas will follow predictable patterns based on instinctive responses.

Prey or predator human or llama the last thing any body wants is to be cornered. All bets are off if you move in to grab an animal around the neck. When you corner an llama and cut off all avenues of escape a sufficiently frightened llama will move any and all ways including jumping over fences and plowing over humans. Using a catch pen and alternatives (described in past issues of this magazine) to the corner grab method will help you avoid these scenarios.

The following herding techniques are based on herding an individual or group to a barn or pen. As you read this description refer to the illustration. In general if you place yourself at a point behind an llama's eye he will move forward and away. Place yourself at a point in front of the eye and he will turn away from you and look for a new escape route in the opposite direction. Place yourself even with the eye and the llama will probably stop. When it come to herding groups of animals you must envision the group as a unit. To push the group forward get behind the last llama in the group. To stop or turn the group get even with or in front of the lead llama. If you have ever almost had your llamas or alpacas through the gate or into the barn and been frustrated when the group turned and ran, you may have been too far forward of the group or too close. If you drift too far forward as the group moves you will first stop them and then turn them. The farther away you are from the group of llamas or alpacas the more ground you must cover to change position relative to the eye which can be a disadvantage on the other hand if you move too close to the group you will cause the group to run away from you instead of herding them in the desired direction. The best strategy is to begin further away than you think you need to be and move only close enough to get the group to walk. How close you can to a group of llamas or alpacas depends on how comfortable your animals are with you and with humans in general on that particular day.

As you begin herding visualize the path you will use back to your destination. Pick a point well behind the llama that is at the far edge of the group). Position yourself behind his eye to begin the herding process. People often think they will save time by

walking to the middle of the llama group and hoping the llamas or alpacas further out will join in as the group is herded. Nine times out of ten just the reverse will happen. The ones closest to the destination will run to join the others further out. Now everyone is running and llama mania ensues. Better to take the extra few minutes to get yourself well behind the group and herd in an orderly manner from the beginning. In general I use the llama furthest away from my destination to as the focus of my herding. Think of your llamas or alpacas like water and creating a path to your destination as building an imaginary sluice. If you pour the water into your sluice too fast the water will spill over the edges. If you block the sluice the water will spill over the edges, in llama terms this means if you attempt to herd a group through a narrow opening or past a scary spot with too much pressure they will stop and bolt in all directions. Narrow gates are not ideal— not impossible— but you must slow down and allow the llamas or alpacas to proceed at what they feel is a safe rate. From a practical standpoint if you hurry the process you will be starting over with llamas or alpacas that are experiencing an adrenaline rush—not good. It is helpful to remember that llamas or alpacas don't have anything else to do and don't mind spending an hour doing something that you find to be a frustrating waste of time... such as running around in a field while the vet taps his foot. It is an exercise in futility to try to herd a portion or one llama away from the group. It is much easier to herd the whole group to a confined area. Cut out the animals that you want and let the rest go. llamas or alpacas are very resistant to being split up.

Using something that serves as an extension of your arms can be very helpful. With two four foot wands or PVC pipes you can triple your reach and simultaneously your effectiveness. As a caution it doesn't help to use these extensions of your arms unless you are prepared to make them meaningful. Allowing your llamas or alpacas to run through your wands or pipes or your arms for that matter is the same as saying disregard my authority and go your own way. Set yourself up for success by using the wands only when you can make them work. Do not put a flimsy piece of pvc pipe or a fiber glass wand in front of an llama that is running willy nilly at 30 miles an hour and expect him to stop-he can't. Use a tool that can be seen. In general white is the most visible (unless you live in the arctic). Use your wands with clarity and don't wave them around. Every movement you make with the wands should have some meaning. I have on occasion given an llama determined to ignore my wands a good rap on the bridge of the nose in order to get their attention and teach them not to ignore me or my directions. However if you begin teaching babies to herd with wands in the first few weeks you will never have to make this kind of emphatic point.

Quite often we herd animals with another person very often a spouse. This is dangerous business... and can lead to DIVORCE! Seriously, it is critical to communicate with your herding partner about where the imaginary sluice is. If your sluice is up to the left and down by the tree and your spouse's is up to the right and down by the pond....I shudder to think. Actually talk out loud and be specific about the exact route you intend to take. "Honey I want em to go up there and over there" is not good enough. Stop and take the time to plan the route "Lets take them up back the back fence line toward the oak tree and out the corner gate." If the llamas or alpacas provoke a change in plans stop and plan again, you won't be wasting your time and you will be helping your llamas or alpacas and your training program.