

# RUMINATIONS: MANAGING MALES

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Mother Nature decided long ago that there would be bachelor herds (see Dr. Bill Franklin's literature on the guanaco). She also decided that every animal in a herd would know exactly where it stood within that herd—the pecking order. It only needs to know its own position—whether #5 or #55 doesn't matter—competing only with the ones just above and just below it. There is no need for each animal to take on the whole herd to see where it stands in the pecking order. The process llamas use to determine position can be boisterous. They chase, turn, chase back, chest butt, perhaps scream at each other a bit, and stop when they tire. When males fight, they try to get each other down to the point that the dominant one can make an effort to castrate, which rarely happens.

**We never introduce or re-introduce a single male into a herd.**

In summer, our male llamas and alpacas are divided into three age groups: weanling to 18 months, 18 months to adult, and adults. Each group numbers from 10 to 30. We never introduce or reintroduce a single male into a herd. He would have to argue with many males to find or regain

his position—quite a job. When we bring new males onto the farm, we quarantine them for a couple of weeks, then put them in a pasture adjacent to the group that they will be joining. After a week or so, we put the old guys in with the new ones. This partially overcomes territoriality—the new guys are on home turf more than the others. And, when we take males out for breeding, worming, etc., we always return a group of two or more to the pasture together. Then all of the llamas in the pasture do not chase just one. A lot of stress is eliminated.

We first saw this method at the ranch of Howard Kerstetter in 1988. He had observed it in the semi-wild herds of Peru and Bolivia. Male herds are as common as breeding herds. Breeding males have a harem of 15 to 65 females, and are constantly being challenged. Only the most capable of males becomes a sire. Capability is partially determined by meeting the continual challenges of other males—natural selection. Should we take this away from our studs? Should it be a part of our sire selection process, along with genealogy, conformation and personality? Should a stud be constantly challenged? Answer for yourself: should an adult male that cannot live with other males be bred? We feel that personality is heritable, and more from the sire than from the dam. All our studs live in a herd together.

In winter, our breeding males live with the other males in the barn. We have no adult males that are not a part of the herd. For us, that is as it should be. On the other side of the barn, separated from the males by a four-foot aisle, are the females. As long as the females stay in their area, the males don't even look. They have learned appropriate behavior.

We see a lot written about keeping (or not keeping) males together. At West Mountain Farm, we keep them together in ways that suit our llamas and meet our needs. The only problem we ever had—having had over 300 male llamas—was a torn ear. Keeping males separated creates problems for us.

The more we learn about llamas, the more we realize that we don't know much. We remember so well the first years that we had them—how little we knew then. The least we can do is share our experiences with others so we can grow together.

If we can help with llama or alpaca problems, call, write, or e-mail us.

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