

Calcite and Fly Strike

Early one morning I was called urgently to our barn to look at one of my little white crias, Calcite, who was thought to have broken her leg.

With this in mind I immediately got into my vehicle with the expectancy of a quick dash to the vets/hospital. Upon seeing the cria, from the way she was standing, I knew that her leg was not broken, however the fleece looked grey/black from top to bottom. As I approached her, I could see the fleece was moist and seemed to be moving. When I touched it, it seemed to hang from her leg, was hot and very definitely alive with the worst sight I had yet encountered in my breeding experience thus far. Huge ugly white fat maggots were eating her leg from what seemed to be the inside out.

I carried her into my medical room, onto a scrubbed table, and under a heat lamp. Grabbed the mobile, called the vet whilst making a strong warm saline solution with which to bathe her leg. As instructed I administered an antibiotic injection then applied yellow fly cream to the affected area. This done, was told to observe.

It did not take many minutes to see that the treatment administered so far was having no affect whatsoever, so I removed as much of the cream as I could and started pulling off the maggots with tweezers. The sight was horrendous. These maggots were surfacing from under her skin and eating her alive. I worked furiously with the tweezers, but even after a couple of hours, it was difficult to see that I was making any progress, such was the speed with which they multiplied.

I started to lightly sprinkle neat household salt directly onto the wound as I cleared an area and this seemed at last to show positive signs. Still not happy I rang my vet again and asked him to come out as I was afraid of the damage I was seeing. They had gone down to her bone (like I imagine a piranha would attack flesh) and although she lay on the table as good as gold, I was sure she must have been in a great deal of pain, and feared she may go into shock.



Urgh! Words cannot describe it

Bearing in mind that my vet is 1.5 hours away from me, it had been nearly 4 hours since my first call to him and all this time I had been working on her. The larger

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maggots seemed to be coming under control, but then I started to notice more damp patches appearing, and on these were hundreds of minuscule maggots wriggling around. I got to work on these with a spatula and just kept scraping them off. I would scrape one section clear, wash with saline, dry and repeat at the next point and round and round I went repeating this treatment at every warm and moist area on her little body. These had now migrated to under her armpits on both legs and at the base of her throat. All the while I also had to keep a check on where the larger maggots were raising their heads in the open wound areas.

When my vet arrived he gave her a couple of shots of a stronger antibiotic. We examined the leg for a possible point of entry wound. The only area I had found during my clearing of the maggots, was a tiny nick where the toenail meets the skin, on the top of the toe. Almost like a cuticle snag we might get around one of our own finger nails.

My vet thought it had probably been a blue bottle which had laid its eggs and *voila*.

Having never seen fly strike before, I was horrified at the damage done, and in what must have been a relatively short time too. He told me that my actions with the tweezers was by far the best course to have taken.

Apparently there are two types of maggot. One that lives and thrives on dead flesh. These have been used to clean the dead skin off wounds, and indeed will eat away at old wounds and leave a clean fresh skin underneath. The good guys.

The bad guys are the maggots from say the blow fly or the blue bottle, which love the moist damp areas or wounds onto which they lay their eggs. When their maggots hatch, they burrow into the living flesh and eat and breed, spreading rapidly.

The symptoms this creates in animals is that they stop eating, develop a temperature and if it goes unnoticed will eventually die of the ammonia toxicity from the maggots.

The most common reaction would be to rush for an antiseptic solution to bathe the infected area with. What actually happens here is that the maggots hide back under the skin and as they die, they emit this poison, which will in turn also kill the alpaca, sheep or other host animal.

After virtually 5 hours of plucking, spatula scraping, the maggots abated. I bathed her one last time with the saline solution. Trimmed away all the hanging flesh which was undoubtedly dead, dried her leg well and smothered it in the yellow fly

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cream. Made her and mum cosy under the heat lamp and settled them down together on fresh straw so that mum could give her baby the succour she needed after such a tremendous ordeal. I checked on them every hour until late at night then felt I could do no more than let them rest. The security of suckling and nestling up to mum would hopefully do more for Calcite than anything else that I could do at that stage.

Be sure I was back in the barn early the next morning with a heavy uncertain feeling as to what I might find. To my delight I was greeted by four bright eyes and mum and babe standing looking ready to greet the day. Just to be safe, I let them into the main pen but kept them indoors for a further 24 hours for closer observation. Mum grazed happily on the fresh hay and my little cria suckled and rested as if nothing had happened, except that her leg was very, very yellow and she obviously could not tuck it back under herself.

Many months later, Calcite is running around with the other weanlings, and apart from a yellow leg (albeit every so slightly paler) and areas of skin which I feel will remain devoid of fur growth, no-one would ever guess the trauma she experienced.

So how do you spot fly strike?

The infected area becomes moist, and thus darker in colouration. On a white alpaca it is more obvious than on a dark one because of this, so know the markings on all your alpacas and through regular herd inspections, if anything looks remotely different, especially in the height of the fly season, be vigilant and act swiftly.

Time really does matter with a fly strike. It can mean the difference between life and death of your alpaca.