

RUNNING MOBS OF MALES

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There are a number of theories on running stud males. This paper is about our management of a large mob of males.

If you want to run a group of males together it is very important to select their paddock carefully. If you are planning to put females in the next paddock, it is wise to have double fences, at least 1 metre apart, and the gap can be planted with trees or hedge. This should eliminate the problem of males trying to get through, over or under the fences to get to the females, as this is likely to result in injury, not to mention potentially unplanned pregnancies. We get around this problem by putting either younger boys or weaners in the paddock next to the males. The paddock we use for our males has two sheds for shelter and a lot of trees for shade.

Feeding

Feeding can be more difficult in mobs as there will be a pecking order for food. It is important that males are kept around the 2 to 2.5 body score as if they are thin or overly fat they will be less productive. We have an unlimited supply of oaten hay in one shed, and, depending on the time of the year, a small bale of lucerne hay in the other shed. We have found towards the end of summer when there is less grazing in the paddock, the number of fights increase.



Management of males

We believe that the key to managing males is to minimize reasons for fighting.



We are running about 30 entire males 18 months or older together in a paddock of about 4 acres. It is important to give them space so they can spread out and don't have to be too close to males they don't like. We have found that the more males in the mob the less fights – so actually there are less fights with 30 males than there were with 3 males.

Years ago we used to run the mob of males into a pen in the stock yards and run the females into another pen, then halter up the required males and do our matings. The boys did a lot of fighting and everyone ended up covered in spit including us. Sometimes the boys would be so stirred up they couldn't work.

We now have a catching pen in our stud males paddock. When we wish to do matings we run the males into the pen, halter the ones we want and walk them over to our stock yards, which are out of sight of our male paddock. The males are then tied up so they cannot fight. Any males we do not intend to use that day are released back into the paddock. We then run the mob of females into the stock yards and do the matings. As we finish with each male it is walked back to the catching pen and released so it can go back into his paddock. Generally those in the paddock have lost interest and wandered off before these boys come back.

This extra handling is all about avoiding fights. It is well worth the effort as the matings are done in a calm atmosphere and a more productive result is the outcome.

We do not put males under 18 months of age in with older males, and if a male is small for his age he may not join the mob until he is 2 years or older. If a male is sick or injured, including males who have recently been castrated, the male(s) should be removed from the mob as they will be vulnerable to attack while they are recovering. Once the male has recovered he can be reintroduced to the mob.



Most males get their fighting teeth between 18 months and 30 months of age. As safety of males is paramount it is essential to grind down their fighting teeth so they cannot damage each other.

Mostly wethers will cause less problems than entire males. Our policy is to sell wethers as quickly as possible after they are wethered as we do not need them and they take up space and eat feed which can be better used by our breeding stock. If you have a wether which is causing problems – ask yourself – ‘Why am I keeping this wether’ and if you don’t have a good reason, get rid of it.

Introducing new males

If the male is new to the property he will have a 7 day quarantine period before he is introduced to the mob. When introducing new males to the paddock it is important that they are not seen to be an invader. Some tactics we use when introducing new males are:

- (1) ensure that males meet on neutral territory
- (2) introduce new males the day the mob has been shorn
- (3) feed the mob well away from the gate and put the new male in while they are eating as this will give the new male time to have a look around while the others are busy.

Handling fights

There will be some fighting – that is inevitable and unless the fighting is serious we ignore it as it is part of the normal behaviour of alpaca males.

Avoid fights by:

- (1) keeping the males out of sight of females
- (2) keeping the males not being used out of sight of your mating yards
- (3) spreading feed out so everyone can get their share

- (4) some breeders run llama wethers with their stud males – the llama becomes the “alpha male” and therefore is boss yet at the same time the llama does not bother to fight the alpaca males.

We are in the fortunate position that our “alpha male” is a peace maker rather than an aggressor. He is a suri which gives him a weight and strength advantage. Achilles is very good at finishing fights started by other males. When they fight, Achilles runs at them and ploughs through the group that is fighting, and then walks away leaving the others to pick themselves up and they tend to just wander off. If you have a male or wether which does this job for you they are extremely valuable.

Some ways of breaking up fights include:

- (1) feeding them
- (2) water – either a high pressure hose or throwing water from a bucket
- (3) judicious use of poly pipe

Showing males

Most males are shown without a problem but there are several issues to consider when showing males. It is essential to ensure that the male is always handled by someone who can keep control of it. This is a safety issue, and will also ensure that the male can be judged in the ring as judges are not obliged to struggle with animals which are not under control.

Some show pens are quite high while others are quite low. If you choose to show your male, it is your responsibility to ensure that there is an appropriate pen to house your male. This may mean that you need to arrange some kind of extensions to make the fences higher and this should always be planned in advance. On arrival at the show, we will always check out our neighbours when we are sorting out our pens and if possible we will avoid penning our males next to females of mating age.



In Conclusion, different things will work for different people and different situations. Although this system works for us, it may not be suitable for all farms.