

SPRING IS IN THE AIR

By Susan Haese, Yaringa Alpacas, Currency Creek, South Australia www.yaringaalpacas.com.au
Edited by Dr Alan Mills, Strathalbyn Veterinary Clinic

This is the story of a cria called Spring. Spring was born on January 11th 2008 to a maiden mother. The cria presented head first, and as the birth did not progress within 20 minutes, I went looking for the feet. The feet were about six inches inside the female, and had been caught back as they were folded over at the fetlock joints. I hooked a finger into the fetlock joints and eased them forward and delivered the cria relatively easily, placing her gently on the ground.

As it was almost dark, I moved Spring and her mother into the shed for the night. Spring was fairly weak and within two hours it became obvious that she did not have the strength to even lift her head from the ground. I started bottle feeding her at 2 hours of age and over the first 24 hours she took about 450 mL of milk and started to gain strength. She mainly lay on her side and could kick quite strongly but did not seem to be able to roll into the cush position.

Day 2: Nothing changed much. I kept bottle feeding her every hour or two and monitored her milk consumption. She lay on her side the whole time and I had to put her into the cush position and hold her head up to feed her. I started standing her on her feet and supporting her but every time her front toes touched the ground her fetlocks would roll over so she stood on the top of her feet rather than on her pads.

Day 3: Still bottle feeding with consumption increasing. Still very weak. When I stood her up she still flipped over onto the tops of her feet and she had to be supported the whole time.

First thing in the morning I took cardboard cylinders from toilet paper and slit them vertically and wrapped one around each front leg and bandaged them lightly onto the legs. I was very concerned to make sure the bandages were not too tight and as a result put them on too loosely. Lying on her side and kicking strongly, Spring managed to remove the splints twice before I got them firm enough.

Day 5: Still bottle feeding. In the evening I removed the splints (about 36 hours after they were put on) and stood her up. Spring stood on the pads of her feet for the first time. From this point on, walked on her pads.



Day 6: Still bottle feeding. Over the next few days she learned to roll into the cush position and then stand up by herself. Once we had her on her feet, another problem became more obvious. Spring walked with her nose on the ground most of the time and was apparently unable to lift her head above the level of her spine. Her neck was also twisted with a definite kink in it, and as a result she walked with her body twisted. From here not a lot changed over the next few days other than the milk consumption reaching about 1.3 litres per day.

Day 11: Spring was at this point feeding well from her bottles and was able to stand supported to drink. Milk consumption still about 1.3 litres.

Spring was more mobile and able to stand for longer periods but was still not able to lift her head even as high as the level of her spine unless she was hanging on to her bottle at the time. It was still very noticeable that she had a definite kink in her neck and would stand so that her body was twisted to compensate for this.

We decided at this point that we really needed to find out what was happening and Spring did not seem to be improving yet clearly had the will to live. We felt that if this problem was not able to be rectified it would be better to put her down than to have her grow up as a cripple.

Day 12: Spring went to Dr Alan Mills at the Strathalbyn Vet Clinic and was x-rayed. There were two x-rays taken – one with her lying on her side and the other with her lying on her back. The Xrays were sent to a veterinary chiropractor Dr David Lindsay. The x-rays showed that the joint between the 3rd and 4th cervical (neck) vertebrae was dislocated or sub-luxed. This was causing compression on her spine.



Day 14: The phone call with the report. This is definitely a trauma of some kind and not congenital. We have probably left this too late to rectify. The only suggestion is to put Spring under anaesthetic to achieve muscle relaxation, hang her by her head so as to apply traction and see what happens. The risks we were told were that she may not come through the anaesthetic or she may be paralysed as a result of the traction and have to be put down. If we were to try this though it had to be done immediately, as Dr Lindsay was concerned that the longer the displacement existed the less likely traction would correct the problem.

So, our options were (1) do nothing and lose any chance we have of fixing this and take our chances or (2) go for it whatever the results may be. We decided that as we believed Spring was not a viable animal as she was, we would go for it.

Day 15: Took Spring to the vet for the procedure. About 20 minutes later, Spring returned to the waiting room under her own steam walking slowly but surely with her neck in a cardboard brace. I brought her home and fed her as she had not been fed for several hours before the anaesthetic. There were a number of things immediately noticeable.

1. When Spring walked, she seemed to walk straighter than before, with both her neck and body straighter.
2. Spring's movement was more fluid – less jerky
3. When she urinated, she was able to spread her hind legs much more than before

4. When I came with her bottle she was able to wag her tail really fast – could only wag slowly before.

Day 16: Still bottle feeding. Spring now has a new trick. She can lift up her hind leg to scratch at her neck brace.

Spring can't hold her head up by herself however if I balance her and hold her head up she is able to take a few quick sucks from her mum – there is still milk there so I decided to do this as often as I can. Spring stands with her head noticeably higher than she did prior to the procedure.



Day 17: Now this is what we have been waiting for – a noticeable improvement in the height of her head and neck. Spring is now lifting her head above the level of her spine some of the time but gets tired easily and puts it down again.

Spring seems to have similar muscle development to a newborn at this point and I am assuming it will take a few weeks for her to be able to hold her head up and steady.

Spring wants to feed from her mum but the neck brace is getting in her way. Has a couple of sucks but tends to give up because it she can't do it.

Day 18: I carefully removed the neck brace. Standing behind her Spring's neck is noticeably straighter and she stands with her body straight. Side on she still has a noticeable dip in her neck due to lack of muscle. Still keen to have a suck from mum but getting most of her feed from her bottle.

Day 19: Still bottle feeding but starting to decrease the amount she will drink. Took Spring for a second Xray. Not quite what she had in mind and she put up a bit of a fight. A noticeable difference between this Xray and the first ones.

Day 20: Still bottle feeding but milk consumption has dropped to less than 1 litre for the day.



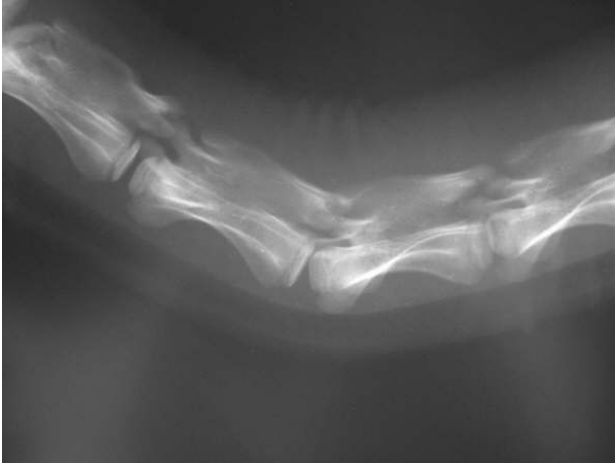


Day 22: Much to our delight, Spring rejects her bottle. Here stomach feels tight so she must be getting enough milk from mum. From this point she never looked back.

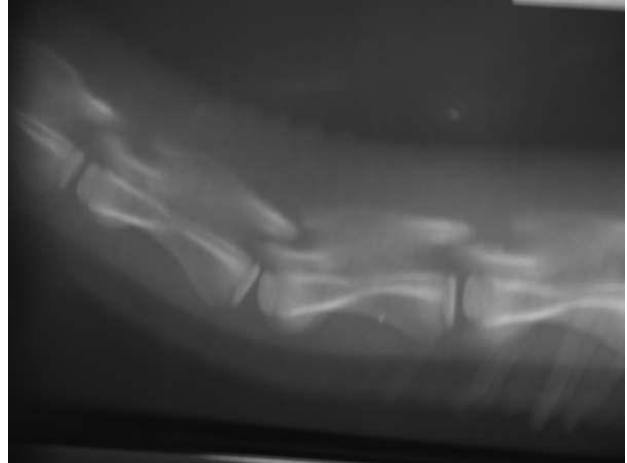
So why is this article called “Spring is in the Air”? I started writing this article when Spring was about five weeks old. That day I saw Spring running fast across the paddock in pursuit of a little friend. She ran up onto the dam bank and I held my breath as she leapt off into space. She landed on the ground some distance below and took off again as fast as she could. Yes, Spring is in the air!

Xrays

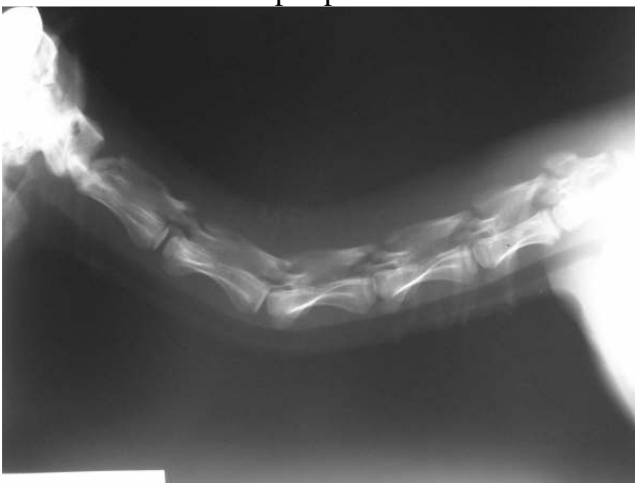
Close up pre procedure



Close up post procedure



Lateral pre procedure



Lateral post procedure





Spring at 5 months of age

Spring has had a highly successful show career. From August to October, she has been to six shows and has amassed one third place ribbon, four second place ribbons including at the AAA National Show in Canberra and Royal Melbourne before finally winning at her last show. Spring will now be shorn and go into our breeding program.



Spring at 9 months of age