

Nunoa Project 2022– 16 years in the Altiplano and the US, and Counting!

Stephen R. Purdy, DVM
President Nunoa Project Peru
Director North American Camelid Studies Program
nunoavet@gmail.com
www.nunoaproject.org

Nunoa Project is a US nonprofit which conducts educational and service programs in the US and the Peruvian Andes. Nunoa Project veterinary teams have been working with camelid (alpaca and llama) farmers in Peru since July of 2006.



Our international goals include elevating production in the alpaca herds of the Peruvian altiplano through improvements in reproduction management and fiber production from alpacas. We have placed multiple teams in the Andes for long term study and coordination with farmers, in addition to conducting our twice annual two week work trips. COVID-19 restrictions forced cancellation of our June 2020 and January 2021 trips. We returned to the altiplano in June 2021. We resumed our twice yearly trips in 2022. Our team members and leaders have come from many countries including the US, Peru, Argentina, New Zealand, the UK, Australia, Canada, and Germany. South American veterinarians maintain contact with Peruvian farmers in between work trips. All of us share a common goal of practical education and helping others to attain a better life.

The high altitude work at 13,000 to 15,000 feet is difficult and uncomfortable by our normal standards. It is very challenging on a daily basis, but the rewards are high. Small changes and interactions with the farm families can make a large difference in their lives. Team members have a strong sense of service to others and a clear perspective of how fortunate we are. Team leaders have developed from early starts with the Project as young veterinarians and students. Team members are comprised of students, veterinarians, and others who want to help. New members start out inexperienced on each trip, but within a few days the teams are working like a well-oiled machine. It is an exercise in international problem solving, teamwork, and flexibility. Schedules are changed on a daily basis, sometimes with no warning. It is the way life is in the altiplano.

Team members commonly deal with altitude sickness and gastrointestinal upsets. The showers are cold or non-existent, the food is very basic, sleeping is interrupted due to the altitude, and it is very cold every night in the high Andes. The roads are rough, but at least we have trucks to move between farms unlike most of the farmers with whom we work. The farmers are often wary of outsiders at first, but they soon recognize that the team comes to work hard and to share knowledge. The Peruvians are after all multigenerational camelid farmers. We come to learn from them also. The children are happy and very inquisitive. They want to see ultrasound images of pregnancies and watch closely as we work with their animals. They are curious to look into microscopes at whatever we are examining. They are the future scientists and leaders of the altiplano.



The work we do includes evaluation of breeding herds including body condition scoring as a measure of herd nutritional status, parasite surveys, evaluation of breeding males, measuring pregnancy rate with ultrasound imaging to evaluate reproductive efficiency, evaluations of breeding females and offspring, and talking to farmers about the problems they see in their herds to try to identify simple solutions. The farmers' primary cash product is alpaca fiber for which they are paid a low price by the pound regardless of quality. Our goals include achieving more fiber production from each herd, and the birth and survival of more offspring each year. We conduct training seminars and clinics which are well attended, with demonstrations and education on practical, hands on techniques.

The *most recent trip to Nunoa District* in the Department of Puno in the southern Peruvian Andes was in June and July of this year. We interacted with a local government veterinarian to assist farmers in the area. We evaluated hundreds of alpacas and worked with new farmers. All plus more are interested in continuing the work with us in 2023. We maintain contact with the farmers through the local alpaca association heads and our Peruvian veterinary coordinator, Dr. Jhoana Jimenez. Dr. Heather Jenkins Brazzell from Virginia is our other team leader in Peru.

Our educational program here in the US, the **North American Camelid Studies Program**, dovetails with the Peruvian work, with about half of our team leaders and workers having been trained in Massachusetts. Pre-veterinary students from the program attend schools throughout the US and many other veterinary students have also been trained by us. Our multi year annual **Intensive Camelid Practice Course** for veterinarians and students was held again in June 2022 and is planned for June 2023. Over 100 of those taking the courses in past years have pursued graduate degrees in veterinary medicine and other fields. Others are employed as educators, researchers, and in veterinary clinics throughout the US.

We rely on private financial support to continue our important work. Please help us by making a tax deductible contribution through our website.



Steve Purdy is a 1981 graduate of the NY State Veterinary College at Cornell University. He has worked as a farm and small animal veterinarian in Virginia, Massachusetts, and Vermont. He is an adjunct professor in the Veterinary and Animal Science department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst after having spent 7 years as a full time teaching faculty member. He continues his teaching and service work with young students and veterinarians in the US and Peru for the Nunoa Project.