

Nunoa Experience Reflection

by Liz Guo

Now as I look back to my Nunoa experience, gratitude is the first word that comes to my mind. What I learned in Nunoa was immense; it does not just include scientific skills and experiences with animals, but rather the things I learned from the people, the animals and the nature there. I learned to stay strong, to stay positive, and to help others and accept help with gratitude.



I remember when I first got to the village, I was discouraged to see that there was no heat, no hot water, and no internet. I started to doubt if I could make it to the end. However, when we were visiting farms and talking to the people from the communities, I realized that while I might only need to stay in this condition for a few months, they will stay here for life. The alpacas there did not have shelters or resources to keep them warm or away from the constant hail, wind and rain. As a result, up to one third of the babies die in their first year. Furthermore, most people did not have the facilities to keep the male and females separated, as well as the alpaca and llama separated, leading to a lower quality in their economical traits such as wool. But still, alpaca/llama production is the main source of income for the people living there; they must have good animals in order to sustain the family. This confirmed my passion to stay here and finish the project for the people.

Before leaving for Peru, I was trained through the North American Camelid Studies Program to conduct the research we try to do on alpacas. However, we were not taught how to climb up mountains at an altitude higher than 13,000 feet with a microscope, tent, food and water. This was a real challenge for our team because some farms were located at a place where a truck cannot access. Hiking became our daily exercise, and I was more fit than I ever had been at the end of the program.

The harsh environment doesn't just challenge the people, but also the animals. During a visit to a nearby research station, I followed a Peruvian vet on his daily routine check to farmers' houses. Everyday he had to get up at 4am, hike for various amounts of time, and to get to the farmers before they put their animals out on the pasture. On that single day, I saw two alpacas crying, one over his own existence, and the other over her dying child. The first one was a cria. He had severe diarrhea, at a point that was viewed not worthy to be treated by the vet. Another alpaca was crying for her recently aborted baby. The nature of motherhood is alike between humans and animals, but without sufficient medicine and money, this poor mother forever lost her child.



To me, any bit of the hard work was rewarding. No matter what condition the farmers lived in, they always welcomed us with hugs and kisses when we came in. At lunchtime, they would feed us although we never asked them to. In the end, the Nunoa Project team were not only

partners with the farmers, but also friends. They taught me Quechua language, and I taught them English and Chinese. The weather remained hailing every afternoon, but our hearts were warmed by the friendship.

During our last visit, we had to say goodbye to the people we had been working with. They all asked the same question, “When are you coming back?” I would have loved to give them a definite answer, but I couldn't. Our work there completely relied on the generous help and donation from alpaca and llama farmers in the US. Without their contribution, none of our progress so far would have been achieved. I am especially thankful to Jane Hamilton-Merritt, Carol Reigh and Natalie Ranck's visit to Nunoa. They brought the warmest hello from the US when we were in the middle of our struggle in fitting in. I am also grateful to everyone who put their thoughts and support in this program to provide me with this unique opportunity. Please consider continuing making contributions to Nunoa Project, as you allow for the alpacas in Peru to be healthier and the farmers to be better off.

Thank you,

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