

Perspective on the Nunoa Project



Humbled. The only word I can think to describe my trip to Peru with Dr. Steve Purdy and the Nunoa Project is humbled. This experience granted me the opportunity to travel outside of the country for the very first time and I was absolutely blown away by the culture and lifestyle difference. Peru is such a beautiful country and the people there are such hardworking and passionate individuals. My entire trip was filled with culture shock after culture shock, from cold showers to an absence of toilets, that not only humbled me but helped me realize all of the little things that I have taken for granted. Not only did I travel and experience a different country for the first time, but I was blessed to be able to work with the Dr. Purdy and the Nunoa Project.



I first met Dr. Purdy when I was a senior in high school during a competition at an alpaca show. I had heard many positive things about Dr. Purdy and his work with camelids from my alpaca 4-H leader as well as other alpaca farmers that I had met over the course of the year, and knew that I wanted to work alongside him. I went into my freshman year as an animal science undergrad at the University of Massachusetts Amherst knowing that in the years to come I would have to work hard in order to be selected to participate in the Nunoa Project.

Fast forward two years later and I found myself stepping off of a plane in Cusco, Peru. I was excited and eager to learn and be challenged in ways that I could never have imagined. Our team consisted of three undergraduate students, four veterinary students, Dr. Steve Purdy, and Dr. Gerardo Diaz. Together we set to work helping to bring more education and veterinary care to the indigenous farmers of Peru. Our first few days in the country were spent working closely with the Llama Pack Project and a number of llama farmers in the region of Huacahuasi along the Inca trail. The Project's focus is to help the farming community get access to veterinary care that will improve their llama herds, and in turn help to bring in more income for the farmers as a whole. Once these farmers have a good working herd, they can use them as pack animals along the Inca trail to improve the finances for the hardworking families of Huacahuasi.



The next leg of the trip took place in Pucara and Lampa where the Nunoa Project worked with and handled over a hundred alpacas on several different farms. We trekked upwards of 14,000 feet in altitude to get to these farms and worked with a number of grateful and engaged farmers, looking to better their alpaca herds. We did body condition scoring, aged alpacas by their teeth, performed pregnancy exams using a portable ultrasound on the females, took testicular measurements on the males, gave input on breeding male selection, and assessed and treated varying ailments. Some of these included eye and ear infections, Sarna (Scabies), and disabling conformation. We also assessed mortality within the different herds and tried to determine the possible causes. As we worked, the farmers expressed more and more interest in what we were doing, some even going to the length of actively participating. Working with these farmers was eye opening

because of how different their management style is compared to those in the US.



This experience came with its ups and downs. Some of the ups included experiencing Peruvian cuisine, meeting and feeling welcomed by all of the beautiful Peruvian people, listening to Dr. Purdy jam out in the back of our transport van to some rock and roll, and all the late nights in our apartment in Pucara playing Heads Up for hours. The only down for my experience was being sent home early on an overnight flight with an oxygen mask strapped to my face due to the onslaught of altitude sickness. When doctors warn you about preparing for altitude and its side effects, it's no joke. Despite missing out on the final days of the trip, I left feeling unbelievably appreciative for the opportunity to be a part of the Nunoa Project. I look forward to my future work with Dr. Purdy, and plan on returning to the beautiful country of Peru with the Nunoa Project in the years to come.

Laura Pepin
University of Massachusetts Amherst, Class of 2019
July 2017

