A Yellow Cria?

By Stephen Mulholland, Ph.D.

As anyone who has tried breeding camelids knows, the colour genetics of these lovely animals can be rather complex. When birth time comes, and the cria just starts to poke out its little nose, I wait in anxious curiosity to see what colour (or colours) have resulted.

In November 2012 one of our alpacas was giving birth, and I was lucky enough to be in the paddock at the time. The head emerged, and it was bright yellow! I knew immediately something odd was going on. The cria was alive and vigorous, so I ran back and got the camera to record the event. When I returned the head and legs were out, and moment later an apparently healthy, and very yellow, boy was on the ground.

As anyone who has tried breeding camelids knows, the colour genetics of these lovely animals can be rather complex. When birth time comes, and the cria just starts to poke out its little nose, I wait in anxious curiosity to see what colour (or colours) have resulted.

In November 2012 one of our alpacas was giving birth, and I was lucky enough to be in the paddock at the time. The head emerged, and it was bright yellow! I knew immediately something odd was going on. The cria was alive and vigorous, so I ran back and got the camera to record the event. When I returned the head and legs were out, and moment later a healthy, and very yellow, boy was on the ground.

Less thana minute old, and getting a sniff from his mother.

What is going on here?

The yellow colour was visible because the cria was white, the tint would have been lost against a darker coloured cria. The colour comes from the meconium, the first stool (poo) the cria was born with. Usually the meconium is

passed in the first 24 hours after birth, but in this case it has emerged early and filled the space created by the birth membrane. The yellowy-brown colour of the meconium, when spread over the bright white fleece of the newborn cria, looks yellow.

What does it mean? What are the risks?

There is a chance that the labour contractions may have been long and hard, enough that they squeezed the cria's abdomen to the point where the meconium was forced out. So even though the labour had looked normal when I arrived, the cria might have had a more difficult birth than it first appeared.

There is also a chance that the cria might have aspirated (inhaled) some of the meconium. This can lead to acute problems like blocked breathing passages, or it can cause a dangerous infection in the days after birth. You should treat the cria as being "at risk", as though they had come through a difficult/assisted birth.

In this case of our little yellow boy we decided (after a chat with our vet) to give him some prophylactic antibiotics, and we kept a careful eye one him for his first week- making sure he was not running a fever, and that he was feeding well and gaining weight.

So if you see a yellow cria, pay extra attention to make sure their unusual birth doesn't turn into a more serious problem. A small preventive action early on can prevent a major disaster later.

Figure Caption: this is an example of a figure caption