Alpaca Mites

Skin disease in alpacas can be due to a number of different causes including bacteria, fungi, allergies, nutritional problems and various parasites including lice and mites.

Of the various parasitic skin diseases, mite infestations are one of the most common and have the most detrimental impact on animal welfare and fibre quality.

There are three more common kinds of mites found on alpacas:

- **Chorioptic**: Increasing occurrence. Harboured between the toes of the alpaca as well as the groin, tailbase, armpits and ears. Much less itchy than the other two and cause scaling and thickening of the skin.

- **Sarcoptic**: Becoming less common. Cause the animal to be intensely itchy, with crusting and thickened skin.

- **Psoroptic**: Least common. Prefer to live on the head and well-fleeced areas. Cause moderate to intense itching.

Although the mites look similar under a microscope and their names sound similar, the treatment for them can be very different. For this reason it is always best for a vet to identify the species of mite before treatment is initiated.

**Diagnosing a mite infestation**

Due to the fact that treatment regimes are species-specific to the mite, it is crucial that we can identify the mite that is present. This will require examining the animal(s) affected to see the locations of the lesions and taking plucks of fibre and skin scrapes from the affected areas. These can then be examined under a microscope in order to identify the mite.

**NOTE**: Mites can be very elusive and it may require several skin scrapes to be taken from different sites before any mites are seen.

**Treatment**

Once a diagnosis has been made it is time to initiate treatment.

Due to the fact that mites will spread very quickly between alpacas (and other species: goats, sheep, cattle) and not all individuals will show clinical signs, it must be assumed that ALL of the animals in the herd or on the premises are infected and therefore ALL animals must be treated.

**Chorioptes**: Live on the surface of the skin and so do not respond well to injectable treatments. Topical treatments should be applied to lesions on affected animals as well as between the toes on affected and unaffected animals. Shampooing the affected areas is also recommended to remove the crusting and scaling skin. Mites can live for weeks in the environment so treatment must be repeated weekly for at least four weeks.

**Sarcoptes**: Respond well to injectable treatments. The mites can live in the environment for a few days so repeat treatment 7-10 days apart will be required.

**Psoroptes**: Respond well to injectable treatments. The mite life cycle can take up to three weeks, so repeat treatment will be required weekly for three weeks.