

ONE TOUGH

By Meyla Bianco Johnston

Mother!



Opposite: Amorette and Lucky at home at Cedar Creek Alpacas in Cook, Washington just a little more than two weeks after the cougar attack happened and just after he got his wounds all stitched up. "Amorette kept a close eye on him for a while after the attack," Angela Rogers says.

Right: Lucky patiently waits as Dr. Mike Foss of Alpine Veterinary Hospital trims dead skin from his wounds about a month after the attack. "He has been our vet for years," Angela Rogers says. Here, a caring vet tech soothes and encourages Lucky while holding him still for treatment at the veterinary clinic.



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For nine years, Cedar Creek Alpacas in Cook, Washington was a peaceful and uneventful place. That is, until 2018.

In mid-September in the middle of the night, a terrifying scene was caught on camera.

As snowflakes slowly fall, a mother alpaca and her cria stand calmly in their pen, with the baby situated against a fence and the mother shielding the baby. Despite this, a cougar suddenly jets in, digs its claws into the baby's back through its little jacket, bites its small neck and immediately drags it away.

Almost instantly, the mother tenaciously chases the cougar across the pen several times. The other alpacas shrink back in fear as the cougar runs back and forth, mother alpaca hot on its heels. All of a sudden, the baby alpaca reappears in the frame, and the cougar jumps the fence and flees.

The black-and-white, slightly grainy footage is truly hard to watch.

At the time, the cria was just a week old and, as of yet, unnamed. Since then, this scrappy survivor has been dubbed "Lucky."

Lucky clearly owes his life to his incredible mother, Amorette, who has been with Cedar Creek since they started raising alpacas.

Owners Angela and Alan Rogers say she is one of the females that regularly make alert calls. She also has somewhat of a reputation as "a tough girl among the herd."

Even so, when they reviewed the footage to see what the mother and baby had been through, Angela says she was "amazed" at how Amorette "went after the cougar and did not give up."

The Rogers knew this episode could have ended far worse, and they were thankful that Amorette didn't get hurt, too.

Aftermath

Immediately after the cougar attack, the Rogers say their veterinarian was surprised the cria survived at all.

"The initial vet visit involved sedating Lucky and cleaning the wound and then stitching him back together," Angela says. "He also had a cut on his cheek that required stitches."

Lucky saw the vet twice a week

immediately after the attack so that professionals could check his progress frequently. He was transported to the vet in a large dog crate and "didn't even complain," Angela says.

"It was hard at times to look at and treat," she admits. But throughout his ordeal, "He has been such a brave little guy."

Angela wasn't the only one shaken. After the attack, the whole herd was on edge for a few days, just as Angela and Alan were. "You know how alpacas are, though. They will not show how they are really feeling when they are sick," Angela says.

As many alpaca breeders will tell you, ailing alpacas often appear as if nothing is wrong, even if they are suffering. This masking of symptoms allows problems to progress further than they should, undetected, which makes it important to watch for any signs of distress carefully, before it is too late.

They moved Amorette and Lucky into a smaller pen to confine them and to keep tabs on Lucky's wounds. At first, Amorette didn't appreciate that very much because she likes having the rest of the herd around her, but she adjusted. True to form, the herd soon settled down and got



Cougar Hunting Techniques

Cougars are also called mountain lions, pumas, panthers and less often, catamounts.

They are considered highly territorial and efficient solitary predators who can cover up to 25 square miles in just one night. Their diet consists mostly of deer, and they can kill and eat one per week. The main food source for cougars is white-tailed deer.

Cougars also eat coyotes, porcupines, beavers, rabbits, marmots, raccoons, birds and other animals.

They are very fast, easily able to out-sprint a deer. Usually, they search for prey over relatively large distances but will sometimes wait for passing game.

Cougars are known for remaining silent much of the time, giving them the advantage of surprise in an attack. After locating prey, they creep up stealthily and position their bodies low to the ground for maximum spring.

When making a kill, they leap on the prey's back and bite into the back of the victim's neck. If the cougar does not eat the entire kill, it will often cache it, covering it for later with leaves, sticks and woodland debris.

Cougars need large swaths of wilderness for habitat, and as this disappears, they are becoming more common in human areas because human-dominated land area is increasing exponentially.

Cougars tend to avoid people in general but will defend themselves if cornered.

back to their regular routine.

However, Alan isn't as stoic and adaptable as the average alpaca. Just about a week after the cougar attacked, he choked up with emotion telling a reporter about the trauma their animals had been through.

"He cares about all animals and doesn't like to see any animal in pain or suffer," Angela says. "Everything was still so fresh, and we were very concerned about the herd and that the cougar was still around."

Road to Recovery

About a month after the attack, the Rogers still needed to give Lucky pain medications every few days and he was continuing a course of antibiotics. "He also had an abscess pop open on his sternum," Rogers says, probably because he was cushioning so much as he rested and tried to recover.

"Most of what the vet team had been doing was cutting away the dead tissue, which was hard and leather-like and needed to be removed to allow the new tissue to grow and heal," Angela says.

Lucky also lost weight after the attack and had trouble gaining it – another big challenge. He was very young and needed continual nourish-

ment to grow and develop properly. They supplemented him with a bottle, which he grew increasingly used to, though at first he was not a fan.

Nearly a month after the attack, the vet removed even more tissue under his chin and along the top of his neck that may have still been making it difficult or painful for him to nurse and get vital nutrients for healing.

This treatment really helped – Lucky finally gained a couple of pounds. Even so, at that time, he weighed only 22 pounds. Angela kept hoping that he would start eating hay more vigorously.

As Lucky healed, his treatments changed.

In mid-November, the vet "put a snazzy sleeve on him that looks



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like a hood with ear holes cut in it.” This was so the Rogers could “keep the bandage near his chin in one place or at least keep the dirt out.” They changed his bandage every day and covered his wounds with natural honey. Angela says, “I really think that helped his healing process immensely.”

Angela says she is not sure Amorette understands why they had to take her baby away twice a week (to the vet) during this difficult time, “but she was always waiting at the gate when we brought him back.”

The Ongoing Predation Problem

Since the attack, the farm has tried a host of deterrents, according to Angela.

They had a great start with the camera already installed originally to allow them to see their herd, particularly the pregnant females, from their cell phones.

After the attack the camera has proven its worth again by showing clearly that the cougar came back – normal behavior for this predator. The cat did not attempt any more attacks or a break-in.

The Rogers have been in close touch with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to learn more and explore their options. Angela says they are “fully aware of the problem.”

In addition, the Rogers have added a motion light to the cougar’s usual path and plan to add more of them. “The WDFW biologist loaned us a ‘Foxlight,’” Angela says. This is a strobe light that runs all night and is supposed to make the predators think someone is outside using a flashlight.

The footage shows that the cougar set off the motion light and sat



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next to the barn near where the attack happened for a few minutes and then left. This gives them clues as to its behavior and habits.

“We have cleared brush, limbed up the trees in the area and we have a five-foot no-climb fence on the outside perimeter.”

They have also added another four feet of cattle panels to the fence and bought ‘Nite Guard’ predator lights that are spaced around the fencing.

In another attempt to thwart the cougar, the Rogers also bought a trap. The first night the trap was set, the cougar arrived at night, but something spooked it. “Maybe the

Opposite: Lucky about a month after the attack wearing a carefully constructed bandage at Alpine Veterinary Hospital in Hood River, Oregon. “He needed more coverage of the wounds,” Angela Rogers says. The goal was to keep the bandage from sliding up, and when all was said and done, they had gone through quite a bit of vet wrap! This shot emphasizes his small size and the extent of his injuries.

Above: The wounds on Lucky’s very small, outstretched neck are healing with raw, natural honey. “We were very pleased when the vet suggested honey,” Angela Rogers says. The honey has helped Lucky heal naturally. “We have also added charcoal dust (Wonder Dust) to the wounds, which helps his healing as well,” Rogers adds.



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Maternal Instincts

- Because alpacas are prey animals, they are always alert. This observant nature ensures they will notice any and all small changes in their environments. If they recognize another animal as a threat, they will move toward it, making vigorous alarm calls as they go.
- The alarm calls are meant to let the intruder know they mean business. If the threat does not make a predator turn tail, alpacas have been known to chase whatever threatens them and shortly after, start stomping. Kicks can leave bruises and toenails can cut.
- Mother alpacas, or dams, are even more sensitive to threats when they are nursing a young cria. Sometimes dams perceive humans as threats to their cria and can be quite difficult – preventing farmers from handling them and the like. In fact, most good alpaca mothers show some concern when their cria are approached.
- Some will show great bravery in protecting their babies, as Amorette did.

smell of the humans throughout the area made it leave,” Angela speculates. Or maybe the light coming on again made the cougar skedaddle. In any case, it left without causing any trouble.

Anatolians

A month after the attack, the Rogers welcomed two then six-month old Anatolian Shepherd/Akbash mix pups to the farm as livestock guardian dogs. Hunter is a male and Adira is a female whose name means “strong” in Hebrew. Their early experience had been guarding goats and chickens.

“The breeder was very good at listening to our needs and recommended the brother and sister pair that we have,” Angela says. “For cougars, you need two dogs for sure.”

They are working out how to fit the dogs into their situation because their property wasn’t ideal for keeping large dogs.

The dogs are not free to roam the property yet because they are still too young. “The pups need to be trained to our farm,” Angela says, “and

the alpacas need to accept them, as well. We are working on perimeter training and socializing them with people and neighbor dogs. They are very smart! They had no leash training before we got them, and they are walking great – for big puppies that is!”

Angela says, “If the cougars aren’t going away, we have to protect the herd this way.” She admits it is “a long road of training,” but they are committed to protecting their herd and making it work with the dogs, no matter how much time it takes and whatever modifications need to be made.

Angela says, “The good news is that we have not seen the cougar here on the farm since we got the dogs. I hope their presence has kept it away.”

Meanwhile, Lucky is making progress every day.

“For us it seems slow, but when I look at old photos from early on, I can see improvement,” Angela says. “He is a very good patient and lets us do the work that needs to be done.

It’s a long road, but it is amazing how his neck is healing and new tissue is growing back,” Angela says.

The Holidays and Beyond

A week before Thanksgiving, Lucky had a rough time. “It got much colder, and he started to struggle with body temperature,” Angela says.

In early December, the Rogers began bringing him inside “a couple of times during the day and then for about six or seven hours in the middle of the night,” Angela says.

“He wasn’t getting enough from mom and was not gaining weight like we wanted him to, so now that he is in the house and is able to eat hay and beet pulp and some powdered supplements, he is doing much better. He hangs out in the living room with us and cushes on his blanket.”

“When we are working in our farm boutique, we bring him in there, too, and he just hangs out. He lets us know when he is ready to go back out to his mom. We are double coat-

ing him this time of year when he is outside.”

The veterinary appointments had decreased to just once every two weeks, but the Rogers were still changing Lucky’s bandage each and every day at this time. Angela expected at least another month of wound care, also.

In the last days of January, Angela reported that the Rogers are now treating Lucky’s wounds with silver sulphadiazine, a cream used for burn victims, and that after two weeks they saw great results. Lucky was continuing to gain weight and had reached 26 pounds. While Angela says he still needs to gain more, “He is not going backwards, so we feel good about that.” The Rogers have to change bandages just every other day now, a relief after months of daily bandage duty.

As for the cougar, it has only vis-

ited again once. This “goes to show that all of the deterrents are helping,” Angela says, because the cougar came back on a night when the Foxlights lent by the WDFW had been returned. It seems another local farm had a visit from four cougars at once and needed them even more urgently than the Rogers.

The new Foxlights the Rogers ordered arrived from Amazon soon after and are now installed. “Thank goodness for Prime,” Angela says.

Meanwhile, the dogs are getting much bigger and learning a lot. On the same night the cougar visited in late January, they alerted the Rogers just like they should have. “The dogs spend a lot of time with their noses in the air and barking,” Angela says.

While the vet says he will need another six months of treatment, things are looking up for Lucky, an incredible cria by all accounts. ●



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Clearly still young themselves, Anatolian/ Shepherd/Akbash mix pups Adira at left and Hunter at right will grow into their duties as livestock guardian dogs. “At seven months old,” Angela Rogers says, “Hunter weighed in at 102 pounds and Adira was 85.” Their presence alone will likely deter nocturnal cougar visits.



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