

CALLANISH ALPACAS.....not just a visitor centre

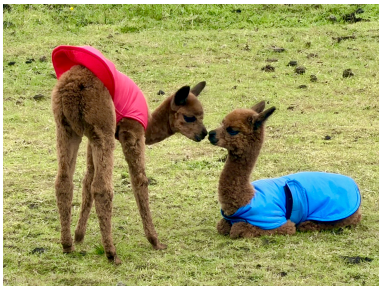
www.callanishalpacas.co.uk or Facebook search [Callanish Alpacos](#)

Many people know Callanish Alpacos as somewhere to meet animals, but it might surprise you that since 2022 we've been a registered charity (Callanish Alpacos SCIO SC052491) and we are not a business. Everything we do is focused on animal welfare, education and supporting our community. As a visitor centre we are only open 15 hours a week for four months of the year and 21 hours a week during the three summer months for the sake of the animals. Entry and tours are **free** and our work is funded entirely through visitor donations, café sales, the gift shop and our own personal contributions. We have yet to find funding to assist with general running costs. Every penny we receive goes straight back into caring for the animals.

Our listed charitable purposes are; animal welfare, education and a recreational and activity centre.



A community of volunteers



Callanish Alpacos is run entirely by ourselves (Clare and Martyn) with help from young people living on the island, UK-wide and international volunteers. Daniel lives in Stornoway, started volunteering with us when he was only 10 years old and 5 years later still helps us for many hours each week. 14 year old Cameron from Tarbert is rapidly catching up! This year we will be hosting volunteers from Germany, Canada, Slovakia, New Zealand, USA, Australia, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland in addition to those from the UK through the Workaway scheme. Several of our local volunteers have been working towards their Saltire Awards (a Scottish volunteer scheme for young people) while other young people are

volunteering here as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. This summer a group of young youth leaders from Northamptonshire joined us for a few days of volunteering having visited us last year. The volunteers' help allows us to care for the animals while giving young people valuable experience in animal care, conservation and community volunteering.

Caring for rare breeds and rescue animals



Today we care for around 180 animals. We focus on perpetuating unusual or rare breeds (we have 20 different breeds of chickens and 15 different breeds of ducks) in addition to re-homing and rescuing animals (around 30% of all the animals here). We currently look after 18 alpacas, 2 baby alpacas (cria) born in June 2026, 15 sheep, 3 Kunekune pigs, 60+ chickens, 80+ ducks, 5 turkeys and 3 peacocks.

Learning beyond a classroom

The educational component is broad. With respect to island-based activities we frequently provide educational tours and sessions for schools, specialised visits by students taking Rural Studies at Outer Hebrides UHI, youth groups, summer schools, Enhanced Provision school units and other educational establishments.

We are also listed as a centre offering "Student Placements for Animal Health Extra-mural Studies" for veterinary students from all over the UK and have had some stay from as far afield as Bristol. We additionally assist in the education of UK based Animal Care/Animal Welfare students.



Supporting crofting and rural skills

We have previously been invited to provide sessions in schools and to other organisations on croft diversification. Many young people wish to remain on the island as crofters, and we aim to help these young people see that crofting can be both sustainable and financially viable. We explain various avenues where on a large enough scale and by expanding the range of activities on offer to include events such as public trekking with an alpaca and use of the alpaca fleece that with these additional sidelines they could make a living as a crofter.



Supporting our community

Much of our out-of-hours time is devoted to referrals from organisations such as the Extended Learning Resource unit based at the Nicolson Institute, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, the NHS Learning Disability service, Western Isles Volunteer Centre and various charitable organisations such as Befriending Lewis, Catch 23 and Ark Western Isles. We also frequently give advice about and/or treat fellow islanders' poultry.

We are currently committed to a long term arrangement whereby we provide at no charge one-to-one hands on experience for 4 hours a week to a 15 year old with autism and the same for an adult with complex additional needs.

We regularly visit Seaforth House Care Home with a selection of unusual and entertaining looking chickens to the delight of the residents...and staff! We have an open door policy for council run support services, Action for Children and Achelos. We have regular visits by Autism Eileanan Siar, Long term Hebrides, Catch 23, the Speak Out group, playgroups, childminders, Rainbows, Beavers, Brownies and Cubs. Many island families visit numerous times a year and bring any friends or family who are visiting them.



Sharing Lewis with the world

Our work has also attracted national attention. In 2021 Callanish Alpacas featured in a programme filmed by BBC Alba over several visits which heavily involved two of our young volunteers. Being fluent Gaelic speakers they were interviewed in Gaelic. The resulting programme (Eilean mo Ghaoil - From Lewis with Love) helped to promote the Gaelic language and culture. Since then we have also featured on the radio show Farming Today (New Year's Day 2025) and were recently filmed by BBC Travel. VisitScotland have used photos for their updated website to showcase the variety of activities on Lewis and Harris.

The turquoise wonder

Perhaps the most unusual member of the charity is our turquoise double decker bus! During opening hours it is used as café seating and as a viewing area for up to 70 people but it also doubles up as a classroom. It is a working bus and is available to the community at no charge. Last year the bus travelled to Arnol and the local community enjoyed burgers inside the warm bus while watching the fireworks!

Other more unusual uses for the bus have been to regularly accommodate Hebridean Way cyclists via the international Warmshowers network (well over 100 cyclists stayed in 2025), it was used overnight by an astronomy group during the 2025 lunar standstill, for children's birthday parties, for story telling sessions and more recently by the cast and crew filming the second series of The Island for BBC Alba.



Looking ahead

In 2025 we received an award from Tripadvisor for being one of the top 10% of places in the world to visit! We also recently had 1.9+ million views of one of our Facebook posts!

Every year our charity continues to grow, but our aim remains the same. Come and discover why Callanish Alpacas is about so much more.

WE'D LOVE TO WELCOME YOU FOR A VISIT...WE'RE EVEN OPEN ON A SUNDAY!