

APPROACH · BALANCE · RELEASE

Using Your Handler Helper

The midline catch — a calmer, safer way to catch, balance, and release llamas and alpacas for husbandry and haltering.

In a perfect world we would all take the time to fully desensitize every animal to human handling — but we all know it isn't a perfect world. The midline catch is built for the real one. It's the technique to reach for with untrained animals, if you have a large herd, and for husbandry tasks when you don't need to halter an animal. Its great advantage is that it works with the animal's balance instead of fighting it.



The payoff — a calm, haltered animal that leads easily. Photos: Brad Bennett

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The midline catch is always done in a small catch pen — a 9×9-foot pen is ideal — and generally with several animals in it at once. There are real advantages to having multiple animals in the pen even when you only need to work with one of them; five or six in a 9×9-foot pen is about right.

Why the midline catch works

It won't teach bad habits. The animal never learns to pull you off balance by throwing its weight into your arm.

It gets easier over time. Animals become easier to catch with each session, not harder.

It flows into the bracelet. The midline catch leads straight into the balancing technique we call the bracelet — together, the two are ideal for everything from trimming toenails to giving injections.

It's a head start. If you'll later show or sell these animals, the midline catch saves enormous time and leads right into wearing a halter.

*The midline catch takes you right into the bracelet —
a fabulous balancing technique for everything from toenails to injections.*



Using the bracelet to balance an animal for toenail trimming.

Making the catch, step by step

STEP 1

Make first contact

Before you start, guesstimate the circumference of the neck and adjust the distance between the ring and the snap so it's just a bit bigger than you think you'll need. Tuck the handler helper into your pocket (a front pocket if you have one) so the hook dangles about 10 inches out and the rest is stuffed inside. Use your body position to maneuver the animal into a counter-clockwise escape route, then approach from the rear with your body close to the animal's. The web of skin between your thumb and fingers is what first lands on the neck, about halfway up. Keep this touch calm and matter-of-fact — this is not done quickly. Fingers stay flat; no grabbing. Your hand is never totally on the off side of the neck. The animal is free to move forward into the escape route you create for him.



STEP 2

Bring your left hand behind the jaw

Set your left hand on the neck just behind the jaw — on the neck, not on the head. A hand on the head frightens the animal and it will toss its head and get away. Once you have two hands on the animal, use the webbing between your thumb and index finger to slide your right hand up behind the ears. Keep your fingers flat: this is not about holding the animal. It's fine for the animal to walk forward into the escape route you provide — you simply stay with it.

STEP 3

The Bracelet

Raise your left elbow as you slide your left hand forward, into the groove just behind the bottom lip. Hands and fingers light, elbows light, weight over your feet: you are not holding the head, you are balancing it — like a plate on a stick. Your fingers never grip the head or the neck. In this position you can very easily balance and steer the animal. This balancing technique is what we call the “bracelet.” You can use it to steady an animal while a partner gives an injection or performs another husbandry task — it gives the handler maximum leverage as well as the ability to steer the animal.



**STEP 4****Guide the direction of the animal**

Now drop the elbow of your left hand so it becomes a cradle — a supporting surface for the head. Keep the animal parallel with a panel and your body behind the eye; don't stand so that your body traps the animal in a corner. Your handler helper waits in your right pocket, hook dangling just outside.

STEP 5**Bring the handler helper around**

Reach down with your right hand and take the hook end of the handler helper out of your pocket. Lift it up and let the hook dangle on the off side of the neck. As you do, adjust your left hand so the hook drops into its waiting fingers. Now the handler helper is around the neck — hook in your left hand, the other end in your right.

**STEP 6****Snap it to the ring**

With the hook now in your left hand, snap it to the ring. (This is why it's important to have the distance between the snap and the hook a bit bigger than you think you need.) The handler helper is settled around the top of the neck — the higher up, the better.

STEP 7**Balance, or give a break**

Now you have choices. Use the handler helper to balance the animal without the need to use both hands, or simply drop it and let the animal take a complete break. When you're ready, catch again — this time much more easily, just by picking up the end of the handler helper.



One tool, many jobs

The handler helper is a versatile tool. Use it in place of a halter for everyday handling and husbandry, or as a gentle way to teach an animal to accept a halter.



Using the handler helper to teach the animal to accept a halter.

The handler helper makes catching your animal calm, quiet, and safe.

Questions or comments? Email marty@camelidynamics.com

A NOTE ON WHEN TO USE IT

The midline catch isn't only for untrained animals. Once your animals are accustomed to your approach, it remains a gentle, low-threat way to catch — a natural technique to graduate to when you no longer need the wand and rope.