

ABOUT NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clonhie Farm, Penpont, Thornhill, DG3 4NB
Meeting Number	08 - Watsons Seeds Andrew Best
Meeting Date	17 th May 2018
Next Meeting	19th July 2018 – 9 TH meeting – which will be our annual open meeting

Clonhie is a tenanted farm on Buccleuch Estates run by Andrew and Aileen Marchant, new entrants to farming in 2012. Neighbouring Glengar was added to the farm business in 2016 taking the total farmed area to 303ha (750ac) running from 100m to 300m above sea level in the Marrburn valley, Penpont in Nithsdale.

Sheep - 900 lambing ewes in 2017 with 240 ewe hogs, which are not in lamb. The main breeds are North Country Cheviots, Lleyn cross and Texel X Beltex. 130 Texel crosses lamb from early March inside, with the remaining 770 lambing outside in April. Aim to increase ewe numbers to ~ 1,250

Cattle – a small herd of 10 Luings is being established with the first calves being born this year. Andrew plans to increase the herd to 40 or 50. Summer grazing heifers are taken on and store cattle are wintered in the sheds as well, which provide excellent cash flow for the business.

Management Group is chaired by local farmer Colin Forsyth, Bennan, and includes Nithsdale Vet Alistair Padkin, David Wilson, Marwhirn; Robert Osborne, Castlehill; John Wildman, Glenkiln; Alisdair Davidson, Poldean; Colin Cuthbertson, Thripland and Andrew Best of Watsons Seeds

KEY MESSAGES

- The kale & swede crop and deferred grass for the winter grazing systems worked very well.
- The red deer have settled in well
- Soils analyses of fields at Glengar are not so bad – lime arrived during the meeting
- Decisions being taken for 2 grass reseed fields



Clonhie Red Deer hinds



Farm tour over to Glengar

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Andrew reported that he was very pleased with the 2 winter grazing trials. He had wintered more ewes than ever, they came through the winter in much better condition than he believed possible - even with the dreadful weather. He bought a total of 9 tons of feeding for the 1000 ewes this spring (compared to 16t for 900 ewes) and body condition scores at the end of March were better this year and had good colostrum at lambing, despite the weather conditions. There was also a lot more grass growth as he has now realised that it is resting the fields/paddocks after intensive grazing (for a short period) that allows incredible recovery and regrowth, even in January, February and March.
- The Highlander cross lambs born to the hogs and a few ewes were tagged at birth and “are looking like they will do the job. They were up and suckled quickly too.”
- The deer fencers started on the 1st February (the day of our 7th meeting) and the deer then arrived on the 14th February. Andrew has been feeding them a little to familiarise them with himself and the farm. They have settled in well and the 65 hinds should begin calving fairly soon.
 - This is a joint venture with Buccleuch Estate, and could only happen so quickly because the estate had already done a lot of work and had decided to establish deer enterprises elsewhere.
 - Joint venture has benefits for both the estate and the Marchants
 - Andrew’s own previous experience in working with deer at Barony also meant that he was familiar with deer husbandry and knew that he would enjoy working with them again.
 - The deer enterprise fits in nicely with the beef and sheep, and being livestock/grass based requires similar skills whilst spreading the risk and selling to a new and expanding market.
 - Spreading the risks will improve resilience in the face of future challenges being faced
 - Gross margin figures are excellent compared to those for beef and sheep currently being attained at Clonhie and across Scotland – the meeting PowerPoint for figures
 - Fencing (~£8.50/m or ~£5.00/m to upgrade existing fences), handling pens and housing are a bit expensive but can certainly be justified in herds over 250 hinds. At present the proposal is to go to between 300 and 400 hinds at Clonhie.
- Andrew Best talked the group through the soils analyses results from the fields over at Glengar. The results are generally better than expected with pH between 5.5 and 6.6. Calcium lime will go on this week up to 5t/ha (2t/ac) depending on requirements for each field.
- There are two fields to be grass seeded this year, the kale field and an awkwardly shaped field with lots of knolls and hollows (not suitable for strip grazing) and which was drained last year.
 - Field 27 (kale crop last winter) is to be a high-quality sward for finishing lambs and young deer so Fyvie mixture with added chicory, plantain and herbs has been chosen. The field is relatively dry one so worth trying chicory and plantain, but success of these additions will be dependent on weather conditions – if it’s another very wet year the additions may not be successful.
 - Field 25 (drained last year) is to be direct drilled with Mingary and added typhon, which will provide excellent grazing for growing/finishing lambs after weaning this summer.

- The farm tour took the community group past the kale field, the red deer paddocks and to the fields where the deferred winter grazing had been. It was amazing to see how these fields had recovered. Rhidian also reported that the field which had been grazed down the hardest during the winter was now one of the most productive, despite the fact that it is a fairly old sward.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Andrew didn't miss the early lambing and felt that lambing everything at one time worked well, except for the awful weather we had in April. Having said that, thank goodness for the thickening hedges which were planted a few years ago as they really did provide some good shelter for young lambs. As mentioned above ewes were in much better condition this year, were healthier and had more milk. Lamb numbers are not what we had hoped for, but given the year we haven't done so badly.
- Because there is no silage left and there are more livestock to feed next winter (the red deer) Andrew is thinking that there may not be space to grow a forage crop this season. The group discussed this and suggested that as kale rape hybrids 'redstart' or 'swift' can be sown in late June or early July (Kale needs to be sown in late May/very early June) depending on grass growth and silage yields it may be possible to consider sowing a later forage crop next month.
- Cows and heifers are calving down well. One heifer lost her calf but there was a twin available which worked out well. There are plenty of heifer calves too, which will be great for growing herd numbers, but not so brilliant for sales!

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

Red Deer Gross margins compared with those of other enterprises

Enterprise	Gross Margin [£/ha]
Current Clonhie sheep flock	497
Average Upland sheep flock (QMS / SAC)	385
Average Upland suckler herd	375
Red Deer budget	720

Rhidian discussed the average farm grass plate meter readings which he has recorded and compared them with last year's growth rates – (see meeting presentation for details). In March there was 170kgDM/ha this year, by mid-April the readings were very similar and by early and mid-May there was 37kgDM/ha and 95kgDM/ha less than in 2017 indicative of this year's later spring. Rhidian also compared the growth rates in field 45 38.5kgDM/ha/day (old pasture) and field 31 61.7kgDM/ha/day (high clover Mingary sward seeded in 2016). With an average demand for grass of 29kgDM/ha/day there will surplus grass growth to allow silage fields to be shut off very soon.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

The final session was a breakout session to discuss this spring's challenges, any solutions found, members' ideas and plans for getting back on track with grazing silage etc for next winter and how the group feel about the different challenges they face in farming, weather, market changes, health & welfare (of both livestock and farm families). There was some colourful language and a good few laughs during the feedback! 😊

ACTIONS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- Paddock grazing to be established and continued for the whole flock, with regular handlings monitoring lamb performance going forwards – will report back progress to the community group
- Plan to wean lambs a bit earlier this year (~90 to 100 days old)
- Deer will be calving in May and June – looking forward to seeing how that goes
- Plan to get reseeded in before too long – weather dependent
- Our next meeting at Clonhie will be in the evening of 19th July and is to be an open meeting – so please encourage friends and family along for an evening of different activities and some fun.
- There is an extra evening farm visit to Douglas Greenshields, Southmains, Sanquhar at 6.00pm on Monday 11th June. This is their 10th year of paddock grazing ~150 store cattle and they have just established a system for paddock grazing some of their 650 cross ewes this year – if you wish to attend please let me know by Sunday evening 10th June.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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