

## ABOUT NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM

Farm name - Clonhie Farm, Penpont, Thornhill, DG3 4NB

Meeting Number - 14 Open Farm Sunday

Meeting Date – 9<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Next Monitor Farm Meeting – 21<sup>st</sup> August

**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 farmed area to 303ha (750ac), from 100m to 300m above sea level near Penpont in Nithsdale.

**Sheep** - numbers are up to 900 lambing ewes all lambing outside in April. Moving over to Aberfield and Highlander cross ewes and using Abertex, and Beltex cross terminal sires.

**Cattle** – Herd of Luing cattle is now up to 16 calving cows & heifers. However summer grazing heifers are also taken on and store cattle are wintered in the sheds on a B&B basis as well.

**Red Deer** – A herd of 150 breeding hinds is being established in collaboration with Buccleuch Estates, with plans to grow numbers to 250

**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



Stags with their antlers in velvet



Ewes and lambs on paddock grazing



George clipping a ewe hogg



Iain showing the sheep feed



Last year's antlers



Guddling around in pond weed



What can be seen under the microscopes?



More science experiments



Ice-cream!



Traybakes



Crafts & Face painting



Busy day on the tractor

## KEY MESSAGES

- Scottish livestock farmers are proud of what we do and welcome the public to learn about our industry
- Farming is a scientific and technical industry, we continually monitor and use all sorts of data and information to look after their livestock and run good efficient enterprises
- We live and work in a beautiful environment that we look after and try to improve

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

**Clonhie Farm Tour** - Melanie McEwan and Rhidian Jones, accompanied by Colin Forsyth led the farm tour that ran three times during the day.

Melanie focused on Habitats and Biodiversity around the pond just to the East of the farm. She challenged attendees to count how many species of plants they could find just where they were standing by using twigs to form a quadrat. Other topics she covered were: natural regeneration of woodland, the importance of insects, birds, bees etc for carrying seed and pollination and wetland habitats.

In the field Rhidian covered the importance of grassland to farming and wildlife. Farms like Clonhie cannot grow crops very successfully due to thin, stony soils (a very shallow soil pit was dug to illustrate this!), high rainfall and altitude. However, it can grow grass very well which ruminant animals like sheep, cattle and deer can utilise and turn into high quality meat or milk. A pile of grass was shown to illustrate how much grass various stock types need each day and to show that grass is generally over 85% water. This highlighted the

fact that, while drinking water should always be provided, in our climate livestock are not a drain on our water resources but merely recycle it. To complete the link with nature the value of cow dung to insects and other invertebrates was discussed. A cow produces enough dung in 5 years to support her own bodyweight in insects etc, all contributing to the food cycle.

Colin summarised the discussion by highlighting the value of grasslands and soils in capturing and storing carbon and the benefits of buying local food over imported food incurring a lot of food miles.

## FARMER'S UPDATE

- Andrew and Aileen welcomed over 450 members of the public from Penpont, Thornhill, Dumfries, Lochmaben, Moffat, Biggar and Edinburgh to their farm business. They talked about their farm, the animals they have and how they look after them all.
- Thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make this event such a success, especially organiser extraordinaire Aileen Marchant, who did a fantastic job
- A total of £950 was raised and donated to RSABI and RHET
- Activities / things to see and do at Clonhie included :-
  - Sheep shearing by George Mair; commentary by Alan Kennedy
  - Tractor and trailer ride past the red deer enclosures to where sheep and lambs were grazing on paddocks
  - Nature walk around the pond to explore the wildlife in and around the pond by Melanie McEwan
  - Brief description of soils management, grass growth and utilisation by Rhidian Jones
  - Ewes and lambs in a large pen with Body Condition Scoring and feeding information
  - 2 Luining cows with their 2 Luining calves in a pen to see up close
  - Clipped hogs for a stock judging competition judged by William Marchant;
  - Cattle and sheep feed displayed by Iain Mackie [thanks to TARRFF VALLEY]
  - Veterinary stand, by Nithsdale Vets, with small animal demonstrations including Wendy Padkins pony
  - Farming and Environment information and the Science lab by Laura Mack from Wallacehall Academy Thornhill with an opportunity to look at specimens from the pond under the microscope and do some analyses of water and soil samples
  - Craft table with animal and farm projects with Shona Robertson and Viki Simpson from Wallacehall academy
  - Face painting by Jennifer Stewart and Jo Dick
  - Bouncy castle, pedal tractors to drive around enclosure, quad bikes to explore
  - Glenurr Ice-cream and Sorbets , teas coffees and traybakes on offer

## FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

**Grassland Discussions** - Rhidian gave some more details on livestock farming:-

- Farmers grow their grass to feed their animals and to do this they need to
  - Look after the soils making sure that pH is correct, minerals are in balance and conditions are right for lots of bugs, bacteria and fungi to live, grow and work properly

- When the grass has grown many farmers split their fields into paddocks for the sheep and cattle to eat a small area down and then move onto a new area with new grass every 2 or 3 days.
- Because of the way the Marchants manage their soils, grassland and animals their farming is not harming the environment. They are sequestering carbon into the soils and doing their bit for the climate change.
- Rhidian had cut a 6kg pile of fresh grass and discussed that
  - this was enough for 1 sheep every day. A cow would need to eat 6 or 7 times this amount, more if she was a dairy cow producing lots of milk
  - this pile of grass contains about 5 litres of water, which in this area falls as rain. So livestock production in wet areas like South West Scotland do not “use a lot of water” to produce red meat. In dry parts of the world irrigation might be needed both to grow the grass or crops and for the animals to drink, but this is not the case here.

## OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

Other discussions had on the day covered a whole variety of topics

- The fact that farmers calculate the nutrition requirements of sheep and cows and ensure that they get the right amount of protein and energy at each stage of their annual cycle e.g. increasing protein and energy in the last few weeks of pregnancy and in early lactation.
- Sheep and cattle breeders select animals for having good feet, teeth and legs as well as for good growth rates.
- The cows are so noisy because they are missing their friends and they want to get back outside to eat fresh grass instead of dry hay
- Farmers are also trying to keep their animals as healthy as possible to reduce antibiotic use
- Shearing sheep does not hurt them. It is like cutting our hair. In fact it needs to be done every year so that the sheep don't get too hot in summer and to prevent flies from laying eggs, producing maggots which would hurt the sheep lots
- The tractor and trailer trip was very popular with some families doing this several times

## ACTIONS FOR NEXT MEETING

Arrange group learning trip to Selkirk in August to visit Giles Henry and Sion Williams

### FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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