

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*Each week the **West Highland Free Press** publishes the text for Roddy Maclean's "Letter to Gaelic Learners" on **BBC Radio nan Gaidheal (103-105 FM)**. The programme is broadcast at 11.50 every Friday morning, and repeated at 7.30 pm the following Monday.**

Bidh sibh eòlach, tha mi cinnteach, air an fhacal “madadh”. Tha am madadh-allaidh ann agus am madadh-ruadh, neo sionnach mar a chanas cuid. Tha na madaidhean-ruadha pailt, a cheart cho pailt, ’s dòcha, anns na bailtean mòra ’s a tha iad a-muigh air an dùthaich. ’S dòcha gu bheil iad nas sàbhailte anns na bailtean mòra far nach eil na sealgairean cho trang!

Ged is e “cù” am facal a th’againn an-diugh ann an Gàidhlig na h-Alba airson *dog*, bha “madadh” a’ ciallachadh na h-aon rud uaireigin. Agus ann an Gàidhlig Arainn, nuair a bha i fhathast beò, ’s e “madadh” a chanadh na daoine airson *dog* mar bu trice, seach “cù”. Agus ann an Eirinn, ’s e “madra” a chanas iad airson “cù” fiù’s an latha an-diugh.

Chan e nach tuig Gàidheil na h-Eireann am facal “cù” ach, mar is trice, tha e ceangailte ri facal eile, mar a tha “madadh” againne ann an leithid “madadh-allaidh” neo “madadh-ruadh”. ’S e eisimpleir dhen a sin “dobhar-chú”. Tha na faclan a’ ciallachadh “cù an uisge”, agus ann an Alba canaidh sinne, mar is trice, “dòbhran” neo “beiste dhubh” ris a’ bheathach sin. Tha am facal “dobhar-chù” againne cuideachd, ge-tà, ach tha e a’ ciallachadh dà bheathach eadar-dhealaichte – an dòbhran fhèin neo beathach a tha a’ tilleadh a dh’Alba an dèidh ceudan bliadhna – am biobhar.

Ach air ais gu “madadh”. Tha corra àite air Ghàidhealtachd far a bheil e ann an ainmean-àite. Àiteachan mar “Cnoc a’ Mhadaidh” is “Preas a’ Mhadaidh” ann an Siorrachd Rois agus tha mi a’ deanamh dheth gu bheil a’ chuid as motha de na h-ainmean sin gu math sean, agus gur e am madadh-allaidh a bhathar a’ ciallachadh. Ach tha aon àite ann far a bheil an t-ainm a’ cur beagan dragh orm fhathast. ’S e sin Loch nam Madadh – neo *Lochmaddy* – loch-mara agus baile air cladach an locha ann an Uibhist a Tuath.

Leugh mi o chionn fhada gu robh seo a’ ciallachadh ann am Beurla *loch of the wild dogs* – Loch nam Madadh. Ach a bheil? Agus ma tha, carson? An robh coin de sheòrsa air choreigin uaireigin pailt ann an Uibhist a Tuath?

An uairsin, fhuair mi a-mach gun d’fhuair an loch ainm bho chreagan a tha faisg air a bheul, agus a tha a’ dìon beul an locha mar a bhiodh coin a’ dìon taigh am maighstir. Tha trì ac’ ann – am Madadh Beag, am Madadh Mòr agus am Madadh Gruamach. An e sin e ma tha? A bheil Loch nam Madadh a’ ciallachadh *loch of the dog-like rocks*? Mmm.

Uill, 's e sin am beachd a bh'aig W.C. MacCoinnich, ceart gu leòr, anns an leabhar aige, *Scottish Place Names*, a chaidh fhoillseachadh ann an naoi ceud deug trichead 's a h-aon – neo naoi ceud deug 's a h-aon deug ar fhichead (1931) ma 's fheàrr leibh. Ach o chionn ghoirid, bha mi a' toirt sùil air leabhar nas sine na sin, *Gaelic Names of Beasts etc*, a chaidh a sgrìobhadh le Alasdair Foirbeis às an Eilean Sgitheanach, agus a chaidh fhoillseachadh ann an naoi ceud deug 's a còig (1905).

'S e an rud a th'ann gu bheil ciall eile air an fhacal “madadh”. 'S e sin “feusgan mòr”. Agus tha Alasdair Foirbeis ag innse dhuinn gun d'fhuair Loch nam Madadh ainm leis gu robh na madaidhean seo – na feusgain – uabhasach pailt air trì creagan, neo sgeirean 's dòcha, air ceann a deas an locha.

Loch of the big mussels ma tha? Uill, cha bu mhath leam a ràdh cò tha ceart is cò tha ceàrr. Fàgaidh mi sin aig muinntir Loch nam Madadh fhèin!

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Faclan na seachdaine: madadh: *dog, wild dog (but also a large mussel)*; madadh-allaidh: *wolf*; madadh-ruadh, sionnach: *fox*; pailt: *plentiful*; sealgairean: *hunters*; trang: *busy*; uaireigin: *at one time*; dòbhran, beiste dhubh: *otter*; dobhar-chù: *otter, beaver*; bìobhar: *beaver*; loch-mara: *sea loch*; Alasdair Foirbeis: *Alasdair Forbes*; feusgan, feusgain: *mussel, mussels*; sgeir, sgeirean: *sea-rock, rocks which are covered at high tide*.

Abairtean na seachdaine: a cheart cho pailt: *just as plentiful*; Gàidhlig Arainn: *the Gaelic of Arran*; mar bu trice: *usually (in the past)*; chan e nach tuig X: *it's not that X doesn't understand*; gur e X a bhathar a' ciallachadh: *that it was X which was meant*; cladach an locha: *the shore of the loch*; an robh coin de sheòrsa air choreigin uaireigin pailt?: *were dogs of some sort plentiful at one time*; beul an locha: *the mouth of the loch*; mar a bhiodh coin a' dìon taigh am maighstir: *as dogs would protect their master's house*; tha trì ac' ann: *there are three of them*; a chaidh fhoillseachadh: *which was published*; a chaidh a sgrìobhadh: *which was written*; cha bu mhath leam a ràdh cò tha ceart is cò tha ceàrr: *I wouldn't like to say who is right and who is wrong*; fàgaidh mi sin aig muinntir Loch nam Madadh fhèin: *I will leave that to the people of Lochmaddy themselves*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdaine: naoi ceud deug trichead 's a h-aon: 1931. *This is not strictly a grammatical issue but certainly one of importance to all Gaelic learners: what counting system are you going to learn? I recommend learning both of them as you will come across both. The old one, based on twenties, is the one generally used and understood by native speakers (although dates and years are often given in English) and it is still in general use in literature and the media. The new system is decimal and is the one generally used in Gaelic-medium education (although it may not be entirely new, as many of the words are to be found in old dictionaries). It is quicker and easier for mathematics at school and, in conversation, it allows us a neater way of naming the “odd” decades. For example anns na tricheadan means “in the thirties”. Without this innovation, it is simpler for Gaelic-speakers to use the English and say “anns na thirties” which is what most native speakers would say. Similarly aig deireadh nan caogadan (at the end of the fifties); aig toiseach nan seachdadan (at the start of the seventies); rugadh e anns na naoidheadan (he was born in the nineties). The other “tens” are ceathrad (40), seasgad (60) and ochdad (80).*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: Bha mi a' toirt sùil air: *I was looking at. The word sùil (eye) is involved in an enormous number of figures of speech – have a look at the entry in Dwelly's Dictionary. If you don't have a copy of Dwelly, put in your order for Christmas!*

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