

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, written and compiled by Roddy Maclean, and specifically aimed at Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Roddy can be contacted by e-mail at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk**

Tha dà eun ann air a bheil ainmean ann am Beurla a thàinig bhon Ghàidhlig – an *ptarmigan*, neo *tàrmachan*, agus an *capercaillie*, neo *capall-coille*. Chan eil fhios a’ m cò às thàinig am “p” aig toiseach an fhacail *ptarmigan*. Gu dearbh, ann an sia ceud deug is seachd-deug (1617), sgrìobh an Rìgh, Seumas a Sia, gu Iarla Thulaich Bhàrdainn, ag iarraidh air “termigantis” a chur thuige. Bha am facal air a litreachadh le “t” aig an toiseach, is chan e “p”.

Chan eil mi buileach cinnteach nas motha dè tha am facal *tàrmachan* a’ ciallachadh. Leugh mi gu bheil e co-cheangailte ris a’ ghnìomhair *tàrmaich* a tha a’ ciallachadh “gin” neo a bhith a’ cumail beathaichean gus am bi àl aca. Ach chan eil mi a’ faicinn carson a bhiodh sin iomchaidh airson an tàrmachain seach eun sam bith eile.

Tha smuain eile agam, ged nach eil mi cinnteach a bheil susbaint mhòr sam bith innte. Ann an Ros an Iar, canaidh na Gaidheil *tormachan* ris – *tormachan* an t-slèibhe. Agus tha facal ann – *torman* – a tha a’ ciallachadh nàdar de dh’fhuaim – *rumbling* neo *murmuring*. Uill, bidh tàrmachain a’ dèanamh fuaim taitneach gun teagamh. Uaireannan, air mullach beinne, cluinnear iad mus fhaicear iad. Agus ’s dòcha gun canadh cuid gur e nàdar de thorman a tha anns an fhuaim sin.

Anns an t-seachdamh linn deug, bha tàrmachain gu leòr air monaidhean àrda ceann a deas na h-Alba, a bharrachd air a’ cheann a tuath. Bha iad eadhon ann an eileanan mar Ile agus Arainn. An-diugh, chan eil iad idir cho pailt ’s a bha iad uaireigin, agus ’s e an t-àite as fheàrr air an son am Monadh Ruadh, agus na beanntan eile làimh ris. Mar is trice, chithear iad ann an àiteachan nas àirde na dà mhìle troigh ach, bho àm gu àm, bidh droch shìde a’ gheamhraidh gan iomain gu talamh ìosal. Chaidh fear a ghlacadh turas air Eilean Iù, faisg air a’ chladach.

Ged nach eil an tàrmachan cho pailt ’s a bha e uaireigin, tha e fada nas sàbhailte nan capall-coille ann an Alba. Tha an capall-coille, eun mòr a tha càirdeach don tàrmachan agus don chirc-fhraoich, a’ fuireach ann an coilltean-giuthais, agus chan eil gu leòr dhiubh sin air fhàgail. Thogadh a’ cheist grunn tursan an robh e ceart a bhith a’ smaoinichadh gur e capall-coille dha-rìreabh an t-ainm a bh’ air. Uill, o chionn còrr is ceithir ceud bliadhna, sgrìobh an t-Easbaig Leslie gur e sin a bh’ ann – capall-coille – *horse of the forest*. ’S dòcha, a-rithist, gur e am fuaim a tha an coileach a’ dèanamh is coireach airson an ainm.

Ach tha eachdraidh dhuilich aig an eun seo ann an Alba. Ann an seachd ceud deug, ceithir fichead ’s a còig (1785), chaidh e à bith. ’S e sgrìobh nan coilltean agus sealg a bu choireach. Chaidh a thoirt air ais bhon t-Suain, a’ tòiseachadh ann an ochd ceud deug, is seachd-deug ar fhichead (1837).

Ach tha dragh mòr aig luchd-saidheans mu dheidhinn. Tha iad ag ràdh nach eil ach mìle air fhàgail agus gu bheil iad ann an cunnart dhol à bith a-rithist. Am measg eile, bidh iad a' bàsachadh ann am feansaichean a tha a' dìon nan coilltean an aghaidh nam fiadh. Tha mi 'n dòchas nach can sinn, anns an àm ri teachd, nach eil ach aon eun air a' Ghaidhealtachd air a bheil ainm Beurla a thàinig bhon Ghàidhlig. Beannachd leibh.

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Faclan na seachdainne: Iarla Thulaich Bhàrdainn: *The Earl of Tullibardine*; tàrmaich: *to beget, propagate, breed*; àl: *offspring*; iomchaidh: *fitting*; susbaint: *substance*; torman: *rumbling, murmuring*; taitneach: *agreeable, pleasant*; am Monadh Ruadh: *The Cairngorms*; sàbhailte: *safe*; coilltean-giuthais: *pine woods*; an t-Easbaig Leslie: *Bishop Leslie*; eachdraidh dhuilich: *a sorry history*; luchd-saidheans: *scientists*; feansaichean: *fences*

Abairtean na seachdainne: sgrìobh X gu Y, ag iarraidh air Z a chur thuige: *X wrote to Y, requesting to him send Z to him*; uaireannan, air mullach beinne, cluinnear iad mus fhaicear iad: *sometimes, on a mountain top, they are heard before they are seen*; bha iad eadhon ann an eileanan mar Ile agus Arainn: *they were even in islands like Islay and Arran*; nas àirde na dà mhìle troigh: *higher than 2 000 feet*; bidh droch shìde a' gheamhraidh gan iomain gu talamh ìosal: *bad winter weather will drive them to low ground*; a tha càirdeach don tàrmachan agus don chirc-fhraoich: *which is related to the ptarmigan and grouse*; gur e am fuaim a tha an coileach a' dèanamh is coireach airson an ainm: *that it is the noise which the cock makes which is responsible for the name*; chaidh e à bith: *it became extinct*; 's e sgrios nan coilltean agus sealg a bu chòir: *it is the destruction of the forests and hunting which were responsible*; chaidh a thoirt air ais bhon t-Suain: *it was brought back from Sweden*; anns an àm ri teachd: *in the future (the time which is to come)*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdainne: an aghaidh nam fiadh: *against the deer. The noun is in the genitive case because it follows a compound preposition. You may recall that in Litir 28 (26 November 1999) I mentioned that the genitive plural form is sometimes identical to the nominative singular (or primary form of the word). The group of nouns represented by fiadh are of this type. They are masculine and their plural in the nominative case is formed by terminal slenderisation. The nominative singular fiadh becomes fèidh in the nominative plural. So in the genitive plural, it reverts to fiadh. Thus we get casan nam fiadh. Similarly, cat becomes cait in the nominative plural. So "the heads of the cats" is cinn nan cat. Another example is ceann itself (a masculine word pluralising to cinn in the nominative). We get Tom nan Ceann (the hill of the heads) . If there is no article present, the same form of the word is used, but it is lenited. Thus we get cinn chat (cats' heads); casan fhiadh (legs of deer); sealladh cheann (a view of heads). How would you say in Gaelic "the sea-rock of the seals"?*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdainne: airson an tàrmachain seach eun sam bith eile: *for the ptarmigan rather than any other bird. Seach is a really neat and concise word meaning "rather than". Try using it this week in conversation or with your teacher.*

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