

# Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for 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, Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclea@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 432. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 128 corresponds to Litir 432.*

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh an t-seachdain sa chaidh mu thuras a ghabh mi fhìn agus an teaghlach agam gu ruige Innis Caillich ann an Loch Laomainn. Fhad ’s a bha mise a’ cumail sùil air a’ bhàta, chaidh càch air chuairt air feadh an eilein. Thàinig iad air ais thugam le sgeul mu bheathach a chunnaic iad.

“Bha e mòr agus bàn,” thuirt iad. “Bha e coltach ri gobhar.”

Ach chan e gobhar a bh’ ann. ’S e *dathas* a bh’ ann. Dathas.

Nise, cuiridh mi geall gu bheil mòran a tha ag èisteachd an-dràsta, eadhon feadhainn le fìor dheagh Ghàidhlig, aig nach eil fios dè th’ ann an dathas. Is beag an t-iongnadh oir tha iad rudeigin gann ann an Alba, gu h-àraidh anns a’ cheann a tuath.

’S e dathas a’ Ghàidhlig air *fallow deer*. ’S e seòrsa de dh’fhiadh a tha dùthchasach do na ceàrnaidhean timcheall na Mara Meadhan-tìrich. Bhathar a’ smaoineachadh gur iad na Normanaich a thug a Bhreatainn iad – airson sealg. Ach tha fianais ann gun robh iad ann an ceann a deas Bhreatainn fada roimhe sin. ’S dòcha gun tug na Ròmanaich a-steach iad. Co-dhiù, an-diugh tha iad pailt ann am pàirtean de Shasainn ’s a’ Chuimrigh.

Ach ciamar a fhuair iad gu eileanan ann an Loch Laomainn? Uill, a rèir beul-aithris, ’s e Raibeart Brus, Rìgh na h-Alba, a bu choireach. Bha am Brusach a’ lorg àite airson dathais a shealg, agus bha eileanan Loch Laomainn glè mhath airson sin. Bha iad **saor bho** mhadaidhean-allaidh. Tha na dathais ann fhathast agus bidh iad a’ snàmh bho eilean gu eilean. Mar sin, chan eil e furasta an cunntadh.

Tha e coltach gun tàinig am facal *dathas* bho *damhasg*. Tha MacBheathain dhen bheachd gun tàinig *damhasg* bho *damh-seasg* – mar gum biodh “*fallow stag*”. Uill, dh’fhaodadh sin a bhith. Ach chan eil *fallow* ann am Beurla a’ ciallachadh “seasg” no “neothorrach” ann an co-cheangal ris an fhiadh seo. Tha e a’ tighinn bho sheann fhacal Beurla a tha a’ ciallachadh dath eadar ruadh is odhar. Sin an dath a th’ orra – agus tha feadhainn aca **ballach no breac**.

Ach nach tuirt mi aig toiseach na Litreach gum facas beathach bàn, seach creutair breac ruadh? Uill, chunnacas, agus sin rud inntinneach mun dathas – gu h-àraidh an fheadhainn ann an Loch Laomainn. Tha mòran dhiubh bàn, seach a bhith ruadh no odhar. Cuiridh mi geall gu bheil an fheadhainn bhàna nas pailte an-diugh na bha iad ri linn a’ Bhruisach. Carson? Uill, bha e air a bhith furasta an sealg, leis gu bheil iad cho faicsinneach ann an dorchadas na coille.

Nuair a dh’fhàg sinn Innis Caillich cha do thill sinn sa mhionaid don àite-fuirich againn ann an Innis Mhearain. Chaidh sinn gu eilean eile air an t-slighe air ais. Innis

Chonachain. Tha an t-eilean sin còmhnard an coimeas ri Innis Caillich – ach tha e cuideachd còmhdaichte le coille – agus tha tòrr fraoich is lusan dearc fo na craobhan. Agus tha beathach annasach a’ fuireach ann. Ach chan e dathas a th’ ann, agus chan eil e bàn.

Bha uachdaran ann uaireigin a bha measail air ualabaithean – beathaichean Astràilianach coltach ri cangarùthan beaga. Thug i feadhainn a-steach do dh’Innis Chonachain agus fhuair cuid dhiubh ma sgaoil. Tha iad fhathast anns an eilean. Leis gun do rugadh a’ bhean agam ann an Astràilia, bha mi airson ualabai Albannach a shealltainn dhi! Ach bha iad gan cumail fhèin am falach air an latha sin is chan fhaca sinn gin.

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**Faclan na Litreach:** càch: *the others*; dathas: *fallow deer*; gann: *rare*; Ròmanaich: *Romans*; pailt: *plentiful*; MacBheathain: [*Alexander*] *MacBain (who wrote “An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language”)*; chunnacas: [*it*] *was seen*; còmhnard: *flat, level*; còmhdaichte: *covered*; annasach: *unusual*; Innis Chonachain: *Inchconnachan*.

**Abairtean na Litreach:** gu ruige Innis Caillich ann an Loch Laomainn; *to Inchcailloch on Loch Lomond*; fhad ’s a bha mise a’ cumail sùil air a’ bhàta: *while I was keeping an eye on the boat*; thàinig iad air ais thugam le sgeul mu bheathach: *they came back to me with a story about an animal*; cuiridh mi geall: *I’ll bet*; is beag an t-iongnadh: *it’s hardly surprising*; na ceàrnaidhean timcheall na Mara Meadhan-tìrìch: *the areas around the Mediterranean Sea*; gur iad na Normanaich a thug a Bhreatainn iad: *that it was the Normans that took them to Britain*; fada roimhe sin: *long before that*; ’s e Raibeart Brus, Rìgh na h-Alba, a bu choireach: *Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, was responsible*; bidh iad a’ snàmh bho eilean gu eilean: *they swim from island to island*; “seag” no “neo-thorrach”: *barren or infertile*; dath eadar ruadh is odhar: *a colour between red-brown and yellow-brown*; gum facas beathach bàn, seach creutair breac ruadh: *that a pale (white) animal was seen, rather than a red-brown spotted creature*; ri linn a’ Bhrusaich: *in [the] Bruce’s time*; cho faicsinneach ann an dorchadas na coille: *so visible in the darkness of the forest*; tha tòrr fraoich is lusan dearc fo na craobhan: *there is a lot of heather and blaeberry below the trees*; bha uachdaran ann uaireigin a bha measail air ualabaithean: *there was once a landowner who like wallabies*; coltach ri cangarùthan beaga: *like small kangaroos*; fhuair cuid dhiubh ma sgaoil: *some of them got loose*; bha iad gan cumail fhèin am falach: *they were keeping themselves hidden*.

**Puing-chànain na Litreach: ballach no breac:** *how do we say “spotted” in Gaelic when referring to animals and plants? You will often hear spotach used – and it will be universally understood. It derives from spot which is obviously a borrowing from English. But there are two commonly used words which have a much older Gaelic heritage – ballach which derives from ball, “a spot” and breac “speckled”. Breac is also a noun meaning “trout” – the native Scottish brown trout being highly speckled.*

**Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: saor bho** mhadaidhean-allaidh: *free of wolves. Note that the preposition in Gaelic is bho/o (ie free “from” wolves).*

\* Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoineachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig.