

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.maclean@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 455. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 151 corresponds to Litir 455.

Carson nach eil sinn a’ dol a-steach gu Mìos na Caillich a dh’ aithghearr? Seadh – Mìos na Caillich – *An Giblean* mar a chanas sinn an-diugh. *The month of April* ann am Beurla. Carson a tha mi a’ cur na ceist? Uill, mìnichidh mi.

Tha dualchas àraidh co-cheangailte ri ainmean nam mìosan ann an Gàidhlig. Tha na h-ainmean uabhasach fhèin inntinneach. Ach cha d’ fhuair mi a-mach buileach ciamar a chaidh na h-ainmean a tha sinn a’ cleachdadh a-nise a stèidheachadh. Oir, ma thèid sibh air ais gu pàipearan-naidheachd an naoidheamh linn deug, cha robh ainmean Gàidhlig nam mìosan buileach mar a tha iad an-diugh.

Mhìnich mi na h-ainmean ann an Litrichean 78 agus 79 as t-Samhain 2000 agus cha leig mi leas dhol thairis orra a-rithist. Ach tha e inntinneach mar a chaidh *An Gearran* a stèidheachadh mar a’ Ghàidhlig air *February*, ach nach d’ fhuair A’ Chailleach a h-àite mar an ainm airson *April*.

Tha *gearran* a’ ciallachadh each a th’ air a spothadh. Ach tha e a’ seasamh cuideachd airson an eich bhig a tha dùthchasach don Ghàidhealtachd. Tha diofar bheachdan aig na seann leabhraichean mu dheidhinn A’ Ghearrain – mus robh e stèidhichte mar co-ionann ri *February*. Tha cuid ag ràdh gum b’ e An Gearran na ceithir seachdainean an dèidh a’ chòigeamh latha deug dhen Mhàrt. Tha cuid eile ag ràdh gur e mìos *February* a bh’ ann. Tha feadhainn eile a’ cumail a-mach nach robh ann ach an dàrna leth de *February*, agus tha cuid eile ag ràdh gun robh e naoi latha a dh’fhaid, a’ tighinn dìreach às dèidh An Fhaoillich.

Seo na chanas Alasdair MacBheathain mu dheidhinn anns an fhaclair aige – *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language*: “[An Gearran] forms a part of the animal nomenclature given to the several periods of Spring-time.” An toiseach, Am Faoilleach – mìos nam madaidhean-allaidh; an uair sin An Fheadag, the plover, nach do mhair ach seachdain. Tha Dwelly ag ràdh gur e An Fheadag an treas seachdain de *February*.

Às dèidh na Feadaig, thàinig An Gearran. An uair sin thàinig A’ Chailleach no *Old Woman*. Bhiodh sin co-ionann ri tràth sa Ghiblean no *April*.

Carson nach do mhair An Fheadag no A’ Chailleach ann am briathrachas nam mìosan? Uill, ’s dòcha gun robh iad ro ghoirid. Cha do mhair A’ Chailleach ach seachdain. ’S dòcha gun robh e na b’ fhasa dìreach Am Faoilleach a dhèanamh co-ionann ri *January* is An Gearran a dhèanamh co-ionann ri *February*. Ach carson a chaidh Am Màrt a thaghadh airson *March*, seach rudeigin Gàidhealach, leithid An Fheadag no eadhon A’ Chailleach? Uill, ’s dòcha gum biodh mì-thuigse ag èirigh. Smaoinichibh air seantans mar “Tha A’ Chailleach fuar, cruaidh

am-bliadhna.” ’S dòcha nach còrdadh sin ri seann bhoireannach an taighe eadhon nam bithte a’ bruidhinn air an aimsir!

Ach, gu h-iongantach, tha a leithid de dh’abairt againn fhathast ann an Gàidhlig – ann an seanfhacal: **’S iomadh fear a thèid le eallaich ri seachdain chruaidh na Caillich.** *Many a man carries a load in the hard week of the Cailleach.* ’S iomadh fear a thèid le eallaich ri seachdain chruaidh na Caillich. Leis gun robh A’ Chailleach ann aig toiseach a’ Ghiblein mus robh càil a’ fàs a-muigh, bha an sprèidh an urra ri feur a bhiodh na daoine a’ toirt dhaibh. Bhiodh tòrr dhaoine a’ giùlain eallaich de dh’fheur air an druim aig an àm sin.

Cha do ràinig mi an earrann ainmhidheach mu dheireadh dhen Earrach – *Na h-Othaisgean*. Nì mi iomradh air sin an ath-sheachdain.

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Faclan na Litreach: An Giblean: *April*; An Gearran: *February* [modern, but see text for explanation]; feadag: *plover*; Na h-Othaisgean: *lit. the ewes* (but see next week’s *Litir*).

Abairtean na Litreach: Carson a tha mi a’ cur na ceist?: *why am I posing the question?*; dualchas àraidh: *a unique heritage*: cha d’ fhuair mi a-mach buileach: *I never found out precisely*; ciamar a chaidh na h-ainmean a stèidheachadh: *how the names were established*; pàipearan-naidheachd an naoidheamh linn deug: *newspapers of the 19th Century*; tha gearran a’ ciallachadh each a th’ air a spothadh: *gearran means a castrated horse (gelding)*; airson an eich bhig a tha dùthchasach don Ghàidhealtachd: *for the small horse (pony) that is native to the Highlands*; tha feadhainn eile a’ cumail a-mach nach robh ann ach an dàrna leth de *February*: *others maintain that it was only the second half of February*; naoi latha a dh’fhaid: *nine days in duration*; carson nach do mhair X: *why didn’t X survive?*; briathrachas nam mìosan: *the vocabulary of the months*; gun robh e na b’ fhasa dìreach: *that it was just easier*; ’s dòcha gum biodh mì-thuigse ag èirigh: *perhaps a misunderstanding might result*; nach còrdadh sin ri seann bhoireannach an taighe: *that wouldn’t be appreciated by the old woman of the house*; eadhon nam bithte a’ bruidhinn air an aimsir: *even if it was the weather that was being spoken about*; mus robh càil a’ fàs: *before anything was growing*; bha an sprèidh an urra ri feur: *the livestock were dependent on hay*; bhiodh tòrr dhaoine a’ giùlain eallaich de dh’fheur air an druim: *many men would be carrying a load of hay on their back[s]*; an earrann ainmhidheach mu dheireadh dhen Earrach: *the final animal part of the spring [ie named for an animal]*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *I posed a question for you last week: what’s the Gaelic for “in the dog-kennel”, “in the dog-kennels” and “the doors of the dog-kennels”? How did you get on? The answer is “anns an taigh-chon”, “anns na taighean-chon” and “dorsan nan taighean-chon”. A kennel is a “house of dogs” – a taigh-chon [or sometimes a fail-chon]. The second element of the compound is in the genitive plural (without an article) and thus retains its lenited form in all cases. Only the first word (the basic word of the compound – a kennel is a type of taigh not a type of cù) inflects in relation to case. It works in the same way as taigh-chearc (henhouse) and fail-mhuc (pigsty).*

Seanfhaical na Litreach: **’S iomadh fear a thèid le eallaich ri seachdain chruaidh na Caillich:** *many a man carries a load in the hard week of the Cailleach. The Cailleach [lit. Old Woman] is an old name for a period of about a week’s duration in early April. The load is the hay carried to feed the livestock at that time of year.*

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