

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Dreathan-donn

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 rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 1,106. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 802 corresponds to Litir 1,106.

Tha mo smuaintean air an dreathan-donn an-diugh. Eun beag le cridhe mòr! Bha mi sa mhonadh as t-samhradh – air iomall Inbhir Nis, gun a bhith fada bhon taigh agam. Ghabh mi lòn, agus mi nam shuidhe air cùl preas fraoich. Fhad ’s a bha mi an sin, bha dreathan-donn air sgèith mu mo thimcheall, ag èigheachd ’s a’ gearan. Feumaidh gun robh nead aige faisg air làimh.

Agus dè bha e ag ràdh? Uill, bhiodh na seann daoine a’ cur nam faclan seo ann am beul **an dreathain-duinn**.

Thig thig, thig a dhiol-dèirce, Thig thig, thig a ghille-frìde; Is gillean-frìde na h-eòin uile, Ach mise leam fhìn, Ach mise leam fhìn, Gillean-frìde, gillean-frìde.

Gillean-frìde – *mites*, rudan beaga bìodach, suarach. Tha an dreathan-donn a’ cur ‘gillean-frìde’ air na h-eòin eile mar gur e eun mòr gaisgeil a th’ ann fhèin! Tha sin gar toirt gu cnag na cùise. Bha na Gàidheil riamh dhen bharrail gu bheil deagh bheachd aig an dreathan-donn air fhèin. Ged a tha e beag, chan eil e bog. Tha e làn misneachd.

Chì sinn sin anns an t-seanfhacl mun dreathan: **Is bigid e sin, is bigid e sin, mar a thuir an dreathan-donn, nuair a thug e làn a ghuib às a’ mhuir** *‘tis the less for that, tis the less for that, as the wren said, when it sipped a bill-full from the sea.* Is bigid e sin, is bigid e sin, mar a thuir an dreathan-donn, nuair a thug e làn a ghuib às a’ mhuir.

Tha seann naidheachd mun strì eadar an dreathan-donn agus rìgh nan eun, an iolair-bhuidhe. Tha i a’ sealltainn mar a tha an dreathan cho dàna ri Bran. Latha a bha seo, bha an iolair a’ bòstadh mu cho comasach is cumhachdach ’s a bha i. ‘Thèid mise air sgèith nas àirde na eun sam bith eile,’ thuir i, gu h-àrdanach.

Cha robh gin de na h-eòin eile deònach a dhol na h-aghaidh. Uill, cha robh, ach a-mhàin an dreathan-donn. ‘Ist, ’s urrainn dhòmhsa dhol nas àirde na thu fhèin,’ thuir an dreathan.

‘Thusa?!’ ars an iolair, gu fanaideach. ‘Chan eil annad ach isean lag. Seall cho beag ’s a tha thu. Cha bhi thu a’ dol fada bho na preasan is creagan. Bidh mi a’ coimhead sìos air do leithid, nuair a tha mi shuas àrd, oir is mise rìgh nan eun.’

‘Siuthad, ma-thà,’ ars an dreathan-donn. ‘Dearbh e dhuinn!’ Leis an dùbhlán sin, chaidh an iolair an-àirde. Ghabh i a’ ghaoth fo a sgiathan agus chaidh i suas ... is suas. Bha i fada os cionn na talmhainn.

Thug an iolair sùil air an talamh fada fòidhpe. Bha a h-uile rud cho beag bìodach. Cha robh sgeul air an dreathan-donn. Amadan de dh'isean, ag ràdh gum b' urrainn dha a bhith a' dol na b' àirde na iolair!

Agus a-nise an còmhradh: Càite a bheil thu, 'dhreathain-duinn? Tha mi 'n seo, os do chinn! Tha an iolair a' gabhail iongnadh. Tha an dreathan-donn air a druim. Bha e cho aotrom 's nach do mhothaich an iolair dha. Agus, gu dearbh, bha e na b' àirde na 'n iolair!

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Faclan na Litreach: dreathan-donn: *wren*; air sgèith: *flying, on the wing*; nead: *nest*; suarach: *trifling*; a' bòstadh: *boasting*; gu h-àrdanach: *haughtily*; gu fanaideach: *in a mocking manner*; fada fòidhpe: *far below her*.

Abairtean na Litreach: Eun beag le cridhe mòr: *a little bird with a big heart*; gun a bhith fada bhon taigh agam: *not far from my house*; ghabh mi lòn, agus mi nam shuidhe air cùl preas fraoich: *I took lunch while sitting behind a heather bush*; thig a dhiol-dèirce: *come, oh beggar*; is gilleam-frìde na h-eòin uile, ach mise leam fhìn: *all the birds are mites (ie tiny), except me alone*; mar gur e eun mòr gaisgeil a th' ann fhèin: *as if it were itself a big, brave bird*; tha sin gar toirt gu cnag na cùise: *that brings us to the heart of the matter*; dhen bharrail gu bheil deagh bheachd aig an dreathan-donn air fhèin: *of the view that the wren has a high opinion of itself*; cho dàna ri Bran: *as bold as Bran (Fionn's dog)*; cha robh gin de na h-eòin eile deònach a dhol na h-aghaidh: *none of the other birds were willing to go against her*; chan eil annad ach isean lag: *you're just a weak chick/wee bird*; seall cho beag 's a tha thu: *look how small you are*; dearbh e dhuinn: *prove it to us*; chaidh an iolair an-àirde: *the eagle ascended*; càite a bheil thu, 'dhreathain-duinn?: *where are you, wren?*; tha mi 'n seo, os do chinn!: *I'm here above you [chinn, which rhymes with duinn, is a variant of chionn]*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: bhiodh na seann daoine a' cur nam faclan seo ann am beul **an dreathain-duinn**: *the old people would put these words in the mouth of the wren. Dreathan-donn is a compound noun. The latter element means 'brown' but the etymology of the first element is cryptic. Because the basic word of the compound is dreathan (donn being merely a descriptor), this is the word that inflects – so it is slenderised in the genitive singular. Donn also slenderises (as is the rule) so it becomes duinn. You might expect dhuinn but the lenition of the 'd' is blocked by the terminal 'n' on dreathain (another rule!)*

Seanfhacal na Litreach: **Is bigid e sin, is bigid e sin, mar a thuir an dreathan-donn, nuair a thug e làn a ghuib às a' mhuir: 'tis the less for that, 'tis the less for that, as the wren said, when it sipped a bill-full from the sea.**

Tha "Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh" air a maoinachadh le MG ALBA