

An Litir Bheag le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 198 (which corresponds to Litir 502). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Do you know the word muir? It means "sea". A' mhuir – the sea. Do you know the word tìr? It means "land". An tìr – the land. Muir is tìr – the sea and the land. Both are important in the Gaidhealtachd.

Well, I have a question for you. What does the word muir-thìreach mean? Muir-thìreach. It's an ainmeir – or noun. It is made up of the words muir and tìr. Muir-thìreach. That's the Gaelic for amphibian. Something that lives in the sea and on land. Muir-thìreach – amphibian. We use muir-thìreach also as a buadhair or adjective. Muir-thìreach – amphibious.

We say that seals are amphibious. Part of the time seals are at sea, fishing and swimming. Part of the time seals are on land, resting. But we don't use the noun muir-thìreach for a seal. A seal is a mammal. A seal is not an amphibian.

But what about a losgann or frog? Frogs don't go to sea. Frogs don't like salt. They live in freshwater, and on land near

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Uill, tha ceist agam dhuibh. Dè tha am facal muir-thìreach a' ciallachadh? Muir-thìreach. 'S e ainmeir a tha ann – no noun. Tha e air a dhèanamh de na faclan muir agus tìr. Muir-thìreach. 'S e sin a' Ghàidhlig air amphibian. Rudeigin a tha beò anns a' mhuir agus air tìr. Muir-thìreach – amphibian. Tha sinn a' cleachdadh muir-thìreach cuideachd mar bhuadhair no adjective. Muir-thìreach – amphibious.

Tha sinn ag ràdh gu bheil ròin muir-thìreach. Pàirt dhen ùine bidh ròin aig muir, ag iasgach is a' snàmh. Pàirt dhen ùine bidh ròin air tìr, a' gabhail fois. Ach cha bhi sinn a' gabhail muir-thìreach mar ainmeir air ròin. 'S e ròin mamail. Chan e ròin muir-thìreach.

Ach dè mu dheidhinn losgann, no frog? Cha bhi losgannan a' dol gu muir. Cha toigh le losgannan salann. Tha iad beò ann am fìor-uisge, agus air

freshwater. Do you reckon we should call an amphibian “uisge-thìreach”, rather than a muir-thìreach?

Well, I'd say that “muir-thìreach” is okay because that's [simply] the word we have for amphibian. And the word amphibian in English doesn't tell [us] that the animal splits its life between water and land. Amphibian means “dà-bheathach” or one with a double life. It comes from Ancient Greek. And some people call an amphibian dà-bheathach in Gaelic.

The word muir-thìreach is on a new website which is very useful. On the site, there are many Gaelic names for plants and animals. It is a site belonging to Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba – that's Scottish Natural Heritage or SNH. The site is at www.snh.org.uk/gaelic/dictionary. Why don't you have a look at it?

tìr faisg air fìor-uisge. Saoil an e “uisge-thìreach” a bu chòir a bhith againn air amphibian, seach muir-thìreach?

Uill, chanainn gu bheil “muir-thìreach” ceart gu leòr, oir 's e sin am facal a tha againn airson amphibian. Agus chan eil am facal amphibian ann am Beurla ag innse gu bheil an t-ainmhidh a' dol eadar uisge agus tìr. Tha amphibian a' ciallachadh “dà-bheathach” no one with a double life. Tha e a' tighinn bhon t-seann Ghreuaais. Agus bidh cuid ag ràdh dà-bheathach ann an Gàidhlig airson amphibian.

Tha am facal muir-thìreach air làrach-lìn ùr a tha gu math feumail. Air an làraich, tha tòrr ainmean Gàidhlig airson lusan is ainmhidhean. 'S e làrach aig Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba – sin Scottish Natural Heritage no SNH. Tha an làrach aig www.snh.org.uk/gaelic/dictionary. Carson nach toir sibh sùil oirre?