

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 394 (which corresponds to Litir 698). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

The hazel tree is special to us as Gaels. It has strong folkloric connections. Our ancestors liked the nuts. And they were using the wood for many purposes.

Hazel trees can be made into a preasarlach. That's a coppice. In a coppiced wood, a tree has many stems, rather than a single trunk. When you cut some of the stems, others grow. The tree doesn't die. But were the Gaels doing much coppicing in the hazel woods?

An interesting book was published recently. Its title is Atlantic Hazel: Scotland's Special Woodlands. The authors say that people in general believe four things about the hazel tree. That is, that it naturally grows under other, bigger trees. Also, where hazel trees are multi-stemmed, that man did that. Also we believe that hazel trees eventually die if they are not coppiced. And, if a hazel tree is not coppiced, that one large trunk will develop on it.

The authors of the book,

Tha a' chraobh-challtainn sònraichte dhuinn mar Ghàidheil. Tha ceangal làidir aice ri beul-aithris. Bha ar sinnsirean measail air na cnothan. Agus bha iad a' cleachdadh an fhiodha airson iomadach rud.

Gabhaidh craobh-challtainn a dhèanamh na preasarlach. 'S e sin coppice. Ann am preasarlach, tha iomadh stoc beag aig craobh, seach aon stoc mòr. Nuair a leagas tu cuid de na stocan, bidh feadhainn eile a' fàs. Cha bhi a' chraobh a' bàsachadh. Ach an robh na Gàidheil a' dèanamh mòran de phreasarlaich anns na coilltean-calltainn?

Thàinig leabhar inntinneach a-mach o chionn ghoirid. 'S e an tiotal a tha air *Atlantic Hazel: Scotland's Special Woodlands*. Tha na h-ùghdaran ag ràdh gu bheil daoine anns an fharsaingeachd a' creidsinn ceithir rudan mun chraoibh-challtainn. 'S e sin gum bi i gu nàdarrach a' fàs fo chraobhan eile a tha nas motha. Cuideachd, far a bheil craobhan-calltainn iomadh-stocach, gur e mac-an-duine a rinn sin. Cuideachd, tha sinn a' creidsinn gum bàsaich craobhan-calltainn an ceann greis mura h-eil iad nam preasarlaich. Agus, mura tèid preasarlach a dhèanamh de chraobh-challtainn, gun tig aona stoc mòr oirre.

Tha ùghdaran an leabhair, Sandy

Sandy and Brian Coppins say that all those things are wrong. They say that hazel trees are naturally multi-stemmed.

But perhaps you know woods where the hazel trees are one-stemmed. Ah, well, Sandy and Brian Coppins say that that is not a natural situation. It's grazing that causes it – grazing by sheep and deer. When we stop the grazing, the trees return to being multi-stemmed.

We see that, for example in the Loch a' Mhuilinn wood in Eddrachillis. A fence was erected around part of a hazel wood. That was to exclude deer. And new stems began to grow from the bases of the trees. It's just grazing that was preventing them from growing.

The authors also say that it is not true that hazel only grows naturally as a shrub under a forest canopy. We'll look at that next week.

agus Brian Coppins, ag ràdh gu bheil a h-uile rud sin ceàrr. Tha iad ag ràdh gu bheil craobhan-calltainn gu nàdarrach iomadh-stocach.

Ach 's dòcha gu bheil sibh fhèin eòlach air coilltean far a bheil na craobhan-calltainn aona-stocach. A, uill, tha Sandy is Brian Coppins ag ràdh nach e suidheachadh nàdarrach a tha ann an sin. 'S e ionaltradh a tha ga adhbharachadh – ionaltradh le caoraich agus fèidh. Nuair a tha sinn a' cur stad air an ionaltradh, tha na craobhan a' dol air ais gu bhith iomadh-stocach.

Tha sinn a' faicinn sin, mar eisimpleir, ann an Coille Loch a' Mhuilinn ann an Eadar-Dhà-Chaolas. Chaidh feansa a chur an-àirde timcheall pàirt de choille-challtainn. Bha sin airson fèidh a chumail a-mach. Agus thòisich stocan ùra a' fàs bho bhuinn nan craobh. 'S e dìreach ionaltradh a bha a' cur stad orra bho bhith a' fàs.

Tha na h-ùghdaran cuideachd ag ràdh nach eil e fìor gu bi calltainn a' fàs gu nàdarrach a-mhàin mar phreas fo dhuilleach na coille. Bheir sinn sùil air sin an-ath-sheachdain.