

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 395 (which corresponds to Litir 699). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was speaking, last week, about the hazel tree. A new book was published recently. Its title is Atlantic Hazel: Scotland's Special Woodlands. The authors, Sandy and Brian Coppins, say that some woods have existed for centuries. Those woods are very old. Thus, they are very valuable.

And the hazel trees themselves grow very old. They put up new stems in place of the old ones that [have] died. Stems and branches die. But the tree lives on.

It's too dark on the floor of the wood to allow other young trees to grow – such as the oak or the birch. But the hazel grows without difficulty – because the new stems are part of an old tree.

Sandy and Brian Coppins are lichenologists. The Atlantic hazel woods are internationally important. Why? Well, an enormous variety of lichens grows in them. The Coppins recognised that some of Scotland's hazel woods are very old. The lichens told them that.

Bha mi a' bruidhinn, an t-seachdain sa chaidh, mun chraoibh-challtainn. Thàinig leabhar ùr a-mach o chionn ghoirid. 'S e an tiotal a tha air *Atlantic Hazel: Scotland's Special Woodlands*. Tha na h-ùghdaran, Sandy agus Brian Coppins, ag ràdh gu bheil cuid de choilltean air a bhith ann fad ceudan bhliadhnaichean. Tha na coilltean sin uabhasach sean. Mar sin, tha iad uabhasach prìseil.

Agus bidh na craobhan-calltainn fhèin a' fàs uabhasach sean. Bidh iad a' cur stocan ùra an-àirde an àite na seann fheadhainn a bhàsaich. Bidh stocan is geugan a' bàsachadh. Ach bidh a' chraobh fhathast beò.

Tha e ro dhorch air làr na coille airson leigeil le craobhan òga eile a' fàs – mar an darach no a' bheithe. Ach tha a' challtainn a' fàs gun duilgheadas – oir tha na stocan ùra mar phàirt de sheann chraobh.

Tha Sandy is Brian Coppins nan eòlaichean chrotal. Tha Coilltean-calltainn a' Chuain Siar cudromach gu h-eadar-nàiseanta. Carson? Uill, tha an t-uabhas sheòrsaichean de chrotail a' fàs annta. Dh'aithnich na Coppins gun robh cuid de na coilltean-calltainn Albannach uabhasach sean. Bha na crotail ag innse sin dhaibh.

Some types of lichen only grow in very old woods. They don't grow where man was coppicing. And they don't grow in young woods. Some of our hazel woods existed in the days of Oisean. And in the days of Oisean's father [Fionn]!

The next time you are out in a hazel wood, keep your eyes open for a special fungus. It's red-brown. It grows on hazel branches. It's like fingers or a glove that is gripping the branch. It's called hazel gloves fungus in English – fungus miotag calltainn. If that fungus is there, the wood is very old.

Atlantic hazel woods are part of a habitat that is rare globally. That is coastal temperate rainforests. And the type in Scotland and Ireland, people call it Celtic Rainforest. Isn't that a beautiful name!

Bidh cuid de na crotail a' fàs a-mhàin ann am fìor sheann choilltean. Cha bhi iad a' fàs far an robh mac-an-duine a' dèanamh preasarlach. Agus cha bhi iad a' fàs ann an coilltean òga. Bha cuid de ar coilltean-calltainn ann am bith ri linn Oisein. Agus ri linn athair Oisein!

An ath thuras a tha sibh a-muigh ann an coille-chnò (no coille-challtainn), cumaibh ùr sùilean fosgailte airson fungus sònraichte. Tha e ruadh. Tha e a' fàs air geugan chraobh-calltainn. Tha e coltach ri meuran no miotag a tha a' greimeachadh air a' ghèig. 'S e *hazel gloves fungus* an t-ainm a tha air ann am Beurla – fungus miotag calltainn. Ma tha am fungus sin ann, tha a' choille gu math sean.

Tha Coilltean-calltainn a' Chuain Siar mar phàirt de dh'àrainn a tha gann air feadh an t-saoghail. 'S e sin coilltean-uisge neo-theth nan cladaichean. Agus an seòrsa ann an Alba is Èirinn, 's e *Coille-uisge Cheilteach* a chanas daoine rithe. Nach brèagha an t-ainm sin!