

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 475 (which corresponds to Litir 779). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

More than fifteen years ago, in the second Litir I wrote, I was on about the Gaelic for spider. I was telling you that my grandmother would say poca-salainn, rather than damhan-allaidh. But I heard another name in Nova Scotia recently. Poca-puinnsein. I heard it several times – poca-puinnsein.

I was in Nova Scotia to speak to people about the links between the Gaelic language and the environment. I spoke to people about names of birds and animals in Scotland and about the oral traditions connected to them. In every place I led an excursion. We were looking at native plants. And I tried to pick up Nova Scotian Gaelic names.

But I didn't pick up enough. On my final morning, I appeared on television – live at breakfast time. The interview was in English. The question was posed to me, 'What's the Gaelic for the blue jay?' Well, I didn't know!

Now, there is a similar bird in Scotland. That's the jay, or sgreuchag-choille. But we don't have the Canadian blue jay. And I said I didn't know. From that time

Còrr is còig bliadhna' deug air ais, anns an dàrna Litir a sgrìobh mi, bha mi a-mach air a' Ghàidhlig air spider. Bha mi ag innse dhuibh gur e poca-salainn a chanadh mo sheanmhair, seach damhan-allaidh. Ach chuala mi ainm eile ann an Alba Nuaidh o chionn ghoirid. Poca-puinnsein. Chuala mi grunn tursan e – poca-puinnsein.

Bha mi ann an Alba Nuaidh airson bruidhinn ri daoine mu na ceanglaichean eadar a' Ghàidhlig agus an àrainneachd. Bhruidhinn mi ri daoine mu ainmean eun is ainmhidhean ann an Alba agus mun bheul-aithris co-cheangailte riutha. Anns gach àite thug mi daoine air chuairt. Bha sinn a' coimhead air lusan dùthchasach. Agus dh'fheuch mi ri ainmean Gàidhlig na h-Alba Nuaidhe a thogail.

Ach cha do thog mi gu leòr. Air a' mhadainn mu dheireadh agam nochd mi air telebhisean – beò aig àm bracaist. 'S ann ann am Beurla a bha an t-agallamh. Chaidh a' cheist a chur orm, 'What's the Gaelic for the blue jay?' Uill, cha robh fios agam!

Nise, tha eun car coltach ann an Alba. 'S e sin an jay, no sgreuchag-choille. Ach chan eil am blue jay Canèidianach againn. Agus thuir mi nach robh fios agam. Bhon uair sin

I found out that the Gaelic name in Nova Scotia is an t-eun gorm. Some say an t-eun liath.

When I was on Cape Breton Island, I saw a rather large bird with a reddish breast. People call it a robin. But it's much bigger than our robin. Indeed, it's more like our thrush. And that's what the Gaels call it – a smeòrach (thrush). The name makes sense. The bird is closely related to our own thrush.

And here's another name I liked over there – màgan. It means a frog or perhaps a toad to some. The two creatures get mixed up there, as they do here. 'Màgan' isn't common in Scotland. But I saw a beautiful name on a town's name sign – Ainslie Glen in English and Gleann nam Màgain (the glen of the frogs) in Gaelic. A noisy place, no doubt!

fhuair mi a-mach gur e *an t-eun gorm* ainm Gàidhlig ann an Alba Nuaidh. Canaidh feadhainn *an t-eun liath*.

Nuair a bha mi air Eilean Cheap Bhreatainn, chunnaic mi eun car mòr le brù ruadh. 'S e *robin* a chanas daoine ris. Ach tha e mòran nas motha na 'm brù-dearg againne. Gu dearbh, tha e nas coltaiche ris an smeòrach againn. Agus 's e sin a tha aig na Gàidheil air – *smeòrach*. Tha an t-ainm a' dèanamh ciall. Tha an t-eun dlùth-chàirdeach don smeòrach againn fhèin.

Agus seo ainm eile a chòrd rium thall – *màgan*. Tha e a' ciallachadh *frog* no ma dh'fhaodte *toad* aig feadhainn. Bidh an dà chreutair a' dol an lùib a chèile mar a bhitheas an seo. Chan eil 'màgan' cumanta ann an Alba. Ach chunnaic mi ainm brèagha air sanas-baile – Ainslie Glen ann am Beurla, agus Gleann nam Màgan ann an Gàidhlig. Àite fuaimneach, is cinnteach!