

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 481 (which corresponds to Litir 785). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

The squirrel only rarely appears in place-names in Scotland. Why is that? Well, in his new book Reading the Gaelic Landscape, John Murray says that it possibly proves that the Highlands were losing their forest when the Gaels were naming the land. The loss of the Highland forests is not a new phenomenon.

But there is one place in the north where the squirrel does appear in the name. It's not called a 'feòrag', however, but 'easag' – an old name for the squirrel. The place is Kintessack near Forres in Moray. That is Ceann na h-Easaig in Gaelic. John Murray reckons that 'easag' in the name means 'squirrel'.

If you are interested in the Highland environment, you should get a copy of Reading the Gaelic Landscape. It contains a lot of information. John found more than six hundred naming elements on maps of the Highlands. In addition to mountains, animals and plants, many are connected to freshwater and saltwater, lochs, rivers, burns and coasts. Perhaps that's not a surprise when one looks at the

Chan eil an fheòrag a' nochdadh ach ainneamh ann an ainmean-àite ann an Alba. Carson a tha sin? Uill, anns an leabhar ùr aige *Reading the Gaelic Landscape*, tha Iain Moireach ag ràdh gur dòcha gu bheil sin a' dearbhadh gun robh a' Ghàidhealtachd a' call a coille nuair a bha na Gàidheil ag ainmeachadh na tìre. Chan e rud ùr a tha ann an call coilltean na Gàidhealtachd.

Ach tha aon àite anns a' cheann a tuath far an nochd an fheòrag anns an ainm. Chan e 'feòrag' a tha oirre ge-tà, ach 'easag' – seann ainm airson na feòraig. 'S e an t-àite – *Kintessack* faisg air Farrais ann am Moireibh. 'S e sin *Ceann na h-Easaig* ann an Gàidhlig. Tha Iain Moireach a' dèanamh dheth gur e 'feòrag' a tha 'easag' a' ciallachadh anns an ainm.

Ma tha ùidh agad ann an àrainneachd na Gàidhealtachd, bu chòir dhut lethbhreac fhaighinn de *Reading the Gaelic Landscape*. Tha an t-uabhas fiosrachaidh ann. Lorg Iain còrr is sia ceud eileamaid ainmeachaidh air mapaichean na Gàidhealtachd. A bharrachd air beanntan, ainmhidhean is lusan, tha an t-uabhas dhiubh co-cheangailte ri uisge is sàl, lochan, aibhnichean, uillt is cladaichean. 'S docha nach eil sin na iongnadh, nuair a

Scottish Highlands.

John is a rod-and-line fisherman. He divulges information that will be useful to other anglers. I'm not sure if that is wise. He is currently a step ahead of many of them because of his knowledge! But it's good that he sees that this is a group that should learn Gaelic.

His advice is that 'Loch Dubha' should be avoided, at least before midsummer. They are cold, acidic and peaty. Some with avian names, such as 'the loch of the birds' and 'the loch of the geese' are better for fishing. Why? Well, the birds fertilize the water. And everybody who reads the book will know that 'the loch of the big trout' and 'the loch of the fat trout' will be excellent fishing lochs!

thathar a' coimhead air Gàidhealtachd na h-Alba.

Tha Iain na iasgair slaite. Tha e a' toirt seachad fiosrachadh a bhios feumail do dh'iasgair eile. Chan eil fhios a'm a bheil sin glic. Tha e fhèin ceum air thoiseach air mòran dhiubh an-dràsta leis an eòlas a tha aige! Ach tha e math gu bheil e a' faicinn gur e buidheann a th' annta a bu chòir Gàidhlig ionnsachadh.

'S e a chomhairle gum bu chòir 'Lochan Dubha' a sheachnadh, co-dhiù ro mheadhan an t-samhraidh. Tha iad fuar, searbhadhach is mòineach. Bidh feadhainn le ainmean eunach orra, leithid Loch nan Eun no Lochan nan Gàadh, nas fheàrr airson iasgach. Carson? Uill, bidh na h-eòin a' tohradh an uisge. Agus bidh fios aig a h-uile duine a leughas an leabhar gur e lochan iasgaich fìor mhath a tha ann an Loch nam Breac Mòra agus Loch nam Breac Reamhar!