

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 566 (which corresponds to Litir 870). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Last week, I was talking about the compound word geal-chasach – white-legged or white-footed. Geal-chasach. But what is the Gaelic for 'black-legged'? Dubh-chasach. That's easy enough, isn't it? Dubh-chasach. Fionn-chasach means pretty much the same as geal-chasach.

Here are other examples of compound words containing 'casach'. Aon-chasach 'one-footed', dà-chasach 'bipedal', ceithir-chasach 'quadrupedal'. There is also the word trì-chasach [three-legged]. I have a three-legged stool at home. And trì-chasach is also a noun, meaning 'tripod'.

Caol-chasach means 'slender-legged'. Brat-chasach, cam-chasach and croma-chasach all mean 'bow-legged'.

That brings me to a traditional story that includes the word croma-chasach. You'll know the fish called lèabag or leòbag – the flounder. We say that the flounder is ceàrr-ghobach – wry-mouthed. Ceàrr-ghobach or cearra-ghobach. And how did it get a mouth like that? Well, St Columba was responsible. Didn't you know that?! Here's the story, then – 'St

An t-seachdain sa chaidh, bha mi a' bruidhinn mun fhacal-fillte geal-chasach – white-legged no white-footed. Geal-chasach. Ach dè a' Ghàidhlig a tha air 'black-legged'? Dubh-chasach. Tha sin furasta gu leòr, nach eil? Dubh-chasach. Tha fionn-chasach a' ciallachadh an ìre mhath an aon rud ri geal-chasach.

Seo eisimpleirean eile de dh'fhaclan fillte le 'casach' annta. Aon-chasach 'one-footed', dà-chasach 'bipedal', ceithir-chasach 'quadrupedal'. Tha am facal trì-chasach ann cuideachd. Tha stòl trì-chasach agam aig an taigh. Agus tha trì-chasach cuideachd na ainmear, a' ciallachadh tripod.

Tha caol-chasach a' ciallachadh 'slender-legged'. Tha brat-chasach, cam-chasach agus croma-chasach uile a' ciallachadh 'bow-legged'.

Tha sin gam thoirt gu sgeulachd thraidiseanta a tha a' toirt a-steach an fhacail croma-chasach. Bidh sibh eòlach air an iasg air a bheil lèabag no leòbag – the flounder. Canaidh sinn gu bheil an lèabag ceàrr-ghobach – wry-mouthed. Ceàrr-ghobach no cearra-ghobach. Ach ciamar a fhuair i beul – no gob – mar sin? Uill – 's e Calum Cille a bu chuireach. Nach robh fios agaibh air sin?! Seo an

Columba and the Flounder’.

One day, Columba was on the sandeel shore. That’s the part of the beach below the low-tide mark at a spring tide. The sublittoral zone – where sandeels live. Anyway, Columba was wading in the sandeel shore. He trampled on the tail of a beautiful white flounder. That [shaltair e] means that he put his foot on the flounder’s tail. He trod on it. He hurt the fish. He damaged its [her] tail. And the sad little flounder shouted at the top of its [her] voice:

*‘Big miserable Columba,
With your crooked, crosswise feet,
You caused me great calamity,*

When you trampled on my tail.’

Columba was angry. The flounder was cheeky. She was accusing the saint of having bandy legs. Columba said to the flounder, ‘If I am bandy-legged, let you be wry-mouthed.’ And he left her like that. From that time, the flounder has been wry-mouthed. And was Columba bandy-legged? I don’t know. And I’m not going to give an opinion!

stòiridh, ma-thà – ‘Calum Cille agus an Lèabag’.

Latha a bha seo, bha Calum Cille san tràigh shìolag. ’S e sin a’ phàirt dhen tràigh fo ìre na h-ìsle-mhara aig an reothart. An tràigh-shìolag – far a bheil sìolagan ‘sandeels’ a’ fuireach. Co-dhiù, bha Calum Cille a’ grunnachadh anns an tràigh-shìolag. Shaltair e air earball aig lèabag bheag bhòidheach bhàn. Tha sin a’ ciallachadh gun do chuir e a chas air earball na lèabaig. Shaltair e air. Ghoirtich e an t-iasg. Dhochair e a h-earball. Agus dh’èigh an lèabag bheag bhrònach aig àird a cinn:

*‘A Chaluum mhòir mhosaich,
Le do chasan cromach,
’S mòr a rinn thu orm de
dhosgadh
Dar [nuair] a shaltair thu air m’
earball.’*

Bha Calum Cille feargach. Bha an lèabag ladarna. Bha i a’ tilgeil air an naomh gun robh e cromach-chasach. Thuir Calum Cille ris an leabaig, ‘Ma tha mise cromach-chasach, biodh tusa cearra-ghobach.’ Agus dh’fhàg e mar sin i. Bho sin amach, tha an lèabag air a bhith cearra-ghobach. Agus an robh Calum Cille cromach-chasach? Chan eil fhios a’m. Agus chan eil mi a’ dol a thoirt beachd air!