

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 579 (which corresponds to Litir 883). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

What is the Gaelic for crane? I don't mean a lifting crane. I'm thinking of the big bird. The names that follow are in Dwelly's dictionary: corra, corra-ghrithreach, corra-mhonaidh, corra-bhàn, corra na h-easgann, tòn-dubh, corra thòn-dubh, bonnan-buidhe, corra-iasg and corra-ghlas.

That's a lot of names for one bird! So, what am I going to call this bird? I have to choose something! Well, I looked in a dictionary which is exceptionally useful, particularly for learners – The Essential Gaelic Dictionary by Boyd Robertson and Iain MacDonald. They call the crane 'corra-mhonaidh'.

A few weeks ago I was in southern England. I was at a nature reserve. I saw cranes there. The bird is grey and more than a metre high. It has a long neck, long legs and a long beak. It has black feathers on its rump. There is black on its head and on its neck. And it has a red piece above its eyes. It's a bit like a heron, but bigger.

Dè a' Ghàidhlig air crane? Chan eil mi a' ciallachadh inneal-togail. Tha mi a' smaoinichadh air an eun mhòr. Tha na h-ainmean a leanas ann am faclair Dwelly: corra, corra-ghrithreach, corra-mhonaidh, corra-bhàn, corra na h-easgann, tòn-dubh, corra thòn-dubh, bonnan-buidhe, corra-iasg agus corra-ghlas.

Tha tòrr ainmean an sin airson aon eun! Mar sin, dè tha mi a' dol a ghabhail air an eun seo? Feumaidh mi rudeigin a thaghadh! Uill, thug mi sùil ann am faclair a tha air leth feumail, gu h-àraidh do luchd-ionnsachaidh – The Essential Gaelic Dictionary le Boyd Robasdan agus Iain MacDhòmhnaill. 'S e corra-mhonaidh a tha acasan airson crane.

O chionn beagan sheachdainean bha mi ann an ceann a deas Shasainn. Bha mi aig tèarmann-nàdair. Chunnaic mi corrachan-monaidh an sin. Tha an t-eun glas agus còrr is meatair a dh'àirde. Tha amhaich fhada, casan fada agus gob fada aice. Tha itean dubha air a tòin. Tha dubh air a ceann agus air a h-amhaich. Agus tha pìos dearg os cionn a sùilean. Tha i rud beag coltach ris a' chorra-ghrithich ach nas motha.

How common was the crane in Britain in olden times? Academics in Manchester University went to place names for evidence on that.

In Old English, the crane was called cran, cron, corn or cranuc. In Old Norse, people said trani. And in Cornish, it was called garan. In those three languages, the researchers found two hundred and seventy one places in which the crane was named.

Those names are throughout England. They are particularly in areas that were wet. There were many boglands in England at one time. The boglands were drained for agriculture.

Cranes like to live in habitats where there is water. There is much water in Scotland. So, was the crane plentiful in Scotland? Was it in Scotland at all? And is it in Gaelic place names in the Highlands? We'll look at the evidence for that next week?

Dè cho bitheanta 's a bha a' chorra-mhonaidh ann am Breatainn anns an t-seann aimsir? Chaidh eòlaichean ann an Oilthigh Mhanchester gu ainmean-àite airson fianais air sin.

Anns an t-Seann Bheurla, 's e *cran*, *cron*, *corn* no *cranuc* a bha air a' chorra-mhonaidh. Anns an t-Seann Lochlannais, 's e *trani* a chanadh daoine. Agus ann an Còrnais, 's e *garan* a bha oirre. Anns na trì cànanan sin, lorg an luchd-rannsachaidh dà cheud, seachdad 's a h-aon àiteachan anns an robh a' chorra-mhonaidh air a h-ainmeachadh.

Tha na h-àiteachan sin air feadh Shasainn. Tha iad gu sònraichte ann an sgìrean a bha fliuch. Bha tòrr bhoglaichean ann an Sasainn aig aon àm. Chaidh na boglaichean a dhrèanadh airson àiteachas.

'S toigh le corrachan-mhonaidh a bhith beò ann an àrainnean far a bheil uisge. Tha tòrr uisge ann an Alba. Mar sin, an robh a' chorra-mhonaidh pailt ann an Alba? An robh i ann an Alba idir? Agus a bheil i ann an ainmean-àite Gàidhlig air a' Ghàidhealtachd? Bheir sinn sùil air an fhianais airson sin an-ath-sheachdain.