

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 665 (which corresponds to Litir 969). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Over the last fortnight, I was looking at three constellations – Orion, The Pleiades and The Plough. There are two stars which are part of the Plough called Merak and Dubhe. If you draw a line from Merak to Dubhe, and if you continue, you'll reach the Pole Star. People use the Pole Star to navigate by the stars at night.

If you continue on the same line through the Pole Star, you'll reach another constellation. It's in the shape of a 'w'. That's A' Chathair – the seat. A' Chathair. In English – Cassiopeia.

Cassiopeia was a queen – in the Greek legends. She fell out with Poseidon – the god of the sea. She was sent to the heavens in a chair as punishment. I'm not sure if the Gaelic name comes from that story or from something similar in the folklore of the Gaels themselves.

Let's return to the Pole Star. It's part of a constellation called Ursa Minor or Little Bear or Little Dipper. An Dreaghod is the Gaelic name for this constellation. I reckon the name is very old. Perhaps it

Thairis air a' cheala-deug a dh'fhalbh, bha mi a' toirt sùil air trì reul-bhadan – an Sealgair Mòr, An Grioglachan agus An Crann-arain. Tha dà rionnaig a tha mar phàirt dhen Chrann-arain air a bheil Merak agus Dubhe. Ma tharraingeas sibh loidhne bho Mherak gu Dubhe, agus ma leanas sibh oirbh, ruigidh sibh an Reul-iùil no Pole Star. Bidh daoine a' cleachdadh na Rèil-iùil airson a bhith ri iùl no steòrnadh air an oidhche.

Ma chumas sibh a dol air an aon loidhne tron Reul-iùil, ruigidh sibh reul-bhad eile. Tha e ann an cumadh 'w'. 'S e sin A' Chathair – the seat. A' Chathair. Ann am Beurla – Cassiopeia.

'S e banrigh a bh' ann an Cassiopeia – ann am faoinsgeulan na Grèige. Chaidh i a-mach air Poseidon, dia na mara. Chaidh a cur don iarmailt ann an cathair mar pheanas. Chan eil mi cinnteach an ann bhon sgeulachd sin a tha an t-ainm Gàidhlig a' tighinn, no bho rudeigin coltach ann am beul-aithris nan Gàidheal fhèin.

Tilleamaid don Reul-iùil. Tha i mar phàirt de reul-bhad air a bheil Ursa Minor no Little Bear no Little Dipper. 'S e An Dreaghod ainm Gàidhlig an reul-bhaid seo. Saoilidh mi gu bheil an t-ainm gu

comes from dreag ‘meteor’ and bad ‘constellation’. Every year around Christmas time, showers of meteors occur which start in the region where Ursa Minor is seen.

Dwelly’s dictionary tells us that there are two stars in Ursa Minor called Na Laoigh. The calves. Na Laoigh. Unfortunately, it doesn’t tell us which are those two stars. If you know, please let me know.

Some planets are similar to stars – for example, Venus. When we see it at sunset, we call it ‘the evening star’. But there is another nice Gaelic name for it. That is ‘the cowherd’s star’. When ‘the cowherd’s star’ appeared in the sky, it was time for all cowherds to go home with the cattle.

math sean. ’S dòcha gu bheil e a’ tighinn bho dreag ‘meteor’ agus bad ‘constellation’. A h-uile bliadhna mu àm na Nollaig, bidh frasan dhreagan ann a tha a’ tòiseachadh far am faicear an Dreagbhod.

Tha faclair Dwelly ag innse dhuinn gu bheil dà rionnaig anns an Dreagbhod air a bheil Na Laoigh mar ainm. *The calves.* Na Laoigh. Gu mì-fhortanach, chan eil e ag innse dhuinn cò an dà rionnaig a tha sin. Ma tha fios agaibhse, nach cuir sibh fios thugamsa.

Tha cuid de phlanaidean car coltach ri rionnagan – mar eisimpleir, Bheunas. Nuair a chì sinn i aig àm dol-fodha na grèine, ’s e Reul an Fheasgair a chanas sinn rithe. Ach tha ainm snog eile againn oirre ann an Gàidhlig. ’S e sin Rionnag a’ Bhuachaille. Nuair a bha Rionnag a’ Bhuachaille a’ nochdadh anns na speuran, bha an t-àm aig gach buachaille falbh dhachaigh leis an sprèidh.