

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 724 (which corresponds to Litir 1,028). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk.

A famous Scottish bird is currently travelling north through western Africa. That's the cuckoo.

It spends the winter in Africa. And, in addition to Scotland, it goes to the whole of Europe – and Asia – in summer. It takes about two months travelling between its wintering places in Africa and Scotland. Thus, the cuckoo is on its way here right at the moment.

How often does the cuckoo suffer bad weather? Very rarely, I'd say. Because it flees from Scotland in the middle of summer to return to Africa.

We have a nice rhyme in Gaelic that is about that. Here it is: O blue cuckoo, O blue cuckoo, Indeed I truly wonder, If not joyful you always are, As with you goes the summer; You really know not weather bad, Nor snow nor winter stormy, For the calm of May you always have, And pleasant times inherit.

Do you know the word subhach – merry, cheerful, joyful? If you're not joyful at all times – if you're not happy all the time. You don't know bad weather, or snow – it never

Tha eun ainmeil Albannach a' siubhal gu tuath an-dràsta tro thaobh an iar Afraga. 'S e sin a' chuthag.

Bidh i a' cur seachad a' gheamhraidh ann an Afraga. Agus, a bharrachd air Alba, bidh i a' dol don Roinn Eòrpa air fad – agus Àisia – as t-samhradh. Tha i a' toirt mu dhà mhìos siubhal eadar a h-àiteachan geamhrachaidh ann an Afraga agus Alba. Mar sin, tha a' chuthag air an rathad thugainn an-dràsta fhèin.

Dè cho tric 's a bhios a' chuthag a' fulang droch shìde? Glè ainneamh, chanainn. Oir bidh i a' teicheadh o Alba ann am meadhan an t-samhraidh airson tilleadh a dh'Afraga.

Tha rann snog againn ann an Gàidhlig a tha mu dheidhinn sin. Seo e: *A chuthag ghorm, a chuthag ghorm, Tha iongnadh orm, gu dearbh, Mur eil thu subhach air gach àm, 'S an Samhradh leat a' falbh. Chan aithne dhuts' droch shìd' gu beachd, No sneachd no Geamhradh garbh, Gur tha thu 'n Cèitean ciùin do ghnàth, 'S air àghmhorachd an sealbh.*

An aithne dhuibh am facal *subhach* – merry, cheerful, joyful? Mur eil thu subhach air gach àm – mura h-eil thu sona fad na h-ùine. Chan aithne dhut droch shìde, no sneachd – cha bhi fuachd a' gheamhraidh a' tighinn ort uair sam bith.

comes under the influence of the cold of the winter.

Last summer, I heard the cuckoo as I've never heard it before. I sailed out to islands in the West Highlands. The weather was gorgeous. I spent the night in a narrow channel between the islands where there is an anchorage. Close by, on the western island, a crag sticks up. If you shout across the narrows from the other island, you get an echo which is excellent.

Next morning the cuckoos were calling. There were five or six birds – on each island. With the echo, it was as if there were dozens [twenties], calling all the time, without quiet between them. Cuckoo. Cuckoo. Cuckoo. Cuckoo.

I hope it won't be too long before we all hear this year's cuckoo. May she have a good, rapid, safe journey!

As t-samhradh sa chaidh, chuala mi a' chuthag mar nach cuala mi riamh roimhe i. Sheòl mi a-mach gu eileanan air taobh an iar na Gàidhealtachd. Bha an aimsir àlainn. Chuir mi seachad an oidhche ann an caolas cumhang eadar na h-eileanan far a bheil acarsaid. Faisg air làimh, air an eilean siar, tha creag a' stobadh an-àirde. Ma dh'èigheas sibh thar a' chaolais bhon eilean eile, gheibh sibh mac-talla a tha fìor mhath.

An ath mhadainn, bha na cuthagan a' goirsinn. Bha còig no sia de dh'èoin ann – air gach eilean. Leis a' mhac-talla, bha e mar gun robh na ficheadan ann, agus iad a' goirsinn fad na h-ùine, gun sàmhchair eatarra. Gug-gùg. Gug-gùg. Gug-gùg. Gug-gùg.

Tha mi an dòchas nach bi e ro fhada agus an cluinn sinn uile cuthag na bliadhna sa. Gum bi turas math, sgiobalta, sàbhailte aice!