

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 774 (which corresponds to Litir 1,078). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was speaking last week about two eagles that were found dead in Applecross. They were golden eagles. This week, I want to tell you about another type of eagle in Wester Ross. That's the osprey. The account comes from the book A Hundred Years in the Highlands by Osgood Mackenzie.

Mackenzie was a landlord. In the mid nineteenth century, he obtained ownership of part of a large freshwater loch called the Fionn Loch. That is near Poolewe. The Fionn Loch is good for fishing.

In that area, there is a small loch called Loch an Iasgair. The Ordnance Survey translated it as 'fisher's loch'. I reckon that they meant people that would go fishing. But that's incorrect. The name means 'the loch of the water eagle' – the loch of the osprey. Locally, the people would call the osprey 'Allan the Fisher'.

Osgood Mackenzie tells us that the birds were nesting on a steep rock pillar beside Loch an Iasgair. One particular year, Lord Huntingfield came with a friend from England. They heard that ospreys were nesting

Bha mi a' bruidhinn an t-seachdain sa chaidh mu dhà iolair a chaidh a lorg marbh air a' Chomraich. 'S e iolairean-buidhe a bha annta. An t-seachdain seo, tha mi airson innse dhuibh mu sheòrsa eile de iolair ann an Ros an Iar. 'S e sin an iolair-uisge. Tha an cunntas a' tighinn bhon leabhar *A Hundred Years in the Highlands* le Osgood MacCoinnich.

Bha MacCoinnich na uachdaran. Ann am meadhan an naoidheamh linn deug, fhuair e sealbh air pàirt de loch-uisge mòr ris an canar am Fionn Loch. Tha sin faisg air Poll Iù. Tha iasgach math anns an Fhionn Loch.

Anns an sgìre sin, tha loch beag ris an canar Loch an Iasgair. Rinn an t-Suirbhidh Òrdanais eadar-theangachadh air mar 'fisher's loch'. Tha mi dhen beachd gun robh iad a' ciallachadh daoine a bhiodh ag iasgach. Ach tha sin ceàrr. Tha an t-ainm a' ciallachadh 'loch na h-iolair-uisge' – *the loch of the osprey*. Gu h-ionadail, 's e Ailean Iasgair a chanadh daoine ris an iolair-uisge.

Tha Osgood MacCoinnich ag innse dhuinn gun robh na h-eòin a' neadachadh air stac cas ri taobh Loch an Iasgair. Bliadhna a bha seo, nochd am Morair Huntingfield agus caraid aige à Sasainn. Chuala iad gu robh iolairean-uisge a' neadachadh aig Loch an

at Loch an Iasgair. Unfortunately, they were egg thieves.

They found the nest. Their servant (valet) swam out, stole the two eggs and swam back to land. He had the eggs in a hat which he gripped in his teeth. Did Mackenzie criticise the robbers? No. As we'll see next week, he was involved in the same practice himself.

At that time, the osprey had already become extinct in England. It didn't have long to go in Scotland. Fortunately, it is now plentiful enough in Scotland. It's even back nesting in England. But whether [or not] it has returned to Loch an Iasgair, I don't know.

Iasgair. Gu mì-fhortanach, 's e mèirlich uighean a bha annta.

Lorg iad an nead. Shnàimh sgalag aca a-mach, ghoid e an dà ugh agus shnàimh e air ais gu tìr. Bha na h-uighean aige ann am bonaid air an do chùm e greim le fhiaclan. An do rinn MacCoinnich càineadh air na mèirlich? Cha do rinn. Mar a chì sinn an ath-sheachdain, bha e fhèin ris an aon dol a-mach.

Aig an àm sin, bha an iolair-uisge air a dhol à bith ann an Sasainn mu thràth. Cha robh fada aice ri dhol ann an Alba. Gu fortanach, tha i a-nise pailt gu leòr ann an Alba a-rithist. Tha i eadhon air ais a' neadachadh ann an Sasainn. Ach co-dhiù tha i air tilleadh gu Loch an Iasgair, chan eil fhios a'm.