

# **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 884 (which corresponds to Litir 1,188). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).

*How would our ancestors forecast the weather? Often, according to oral tradition, they would look at the birds. For example, in the Gairloch area, people would be saying 'when you see the pied wagtail, you'll see the rain. Breac an t-Sìl is a small black and white bird – with a long tail. Pied wagtail in English. I wonder if it comes closer to houses when it's going to rain?*

*The Breacan-baintighearna is related to the pied wagtail. It carries the name 'grey wagtail' in English. If it were seen near the house door, bad weather would be coming. The wheatear also told people that bad weather was in prospect. That was when people saw it, as the first view of the day, standing on a stone.*

*The Welsh scholar, Edward Lhuyd (1660-1709), recorded oral tradition of Scotland's Gaels in the 17th century. They would compare, in the morning, two large black birds. That's the raven and the hoodie crow. If the raven called before the crow, it would be a good day. If the crow called first, there would be bad weather.*

Ciamar a bhiodh ar sinnsearan a' dèanamh ro-shealladh air an aimsir? Gu tric, a rèir beul-aithris, bhiodh iad a' coimhead air na h-eòin. Mar eisimpleir, ann an sgìre Gheàrrloch, bhiodh daoine ag ràdh *Nuair a chì thu breac an t-sìl, chì thu 'n t-uisg*. 'S e *Breac an t-Sìl* eun beag dubh-is-geal – le earball fada. *Pied wagtail* ann am Beurla. Saoil am bi e a' tighinn nas dlùithe ri taighean nuair a tha an t-uisge gu bhith ann?

Tha am *Breacan-baintighearna* càirdeach do bhreac an t-sìl. Tha e a' giùlan an ainm *grey wagtail* ann am Beurla. Nam biodh e ri fhaicinn faisg air doras an taighe bhiodh droch shìde a' tighinn. Bhiodh a' *Bhrù-gheal* no *wheatear* cuideachd ag innse do dhaoine gun robh droch shìde anns an amharc. Bha sin nuair a chunnaic daoine e, mar chiad shealladh san latha, na sheasamh air clach.

Chlàr an sgoilear Cuimreach, Eideard Lhuyd (1660-1709), beul-aithris aig Gàidheil na h-Alba anns an t-seachdamh linn deug. Dhèanadh iad coimeas, anns a' mhadainn, eadar dà eun mhòr dhubh. Sin am fitheach agus an fheannag. Nam biodh am fitheach a' gairm ron fheannaig, bhiodh deagh latha ann. Nam biodh an fheannag a' gairm an toiseach, bhiodh droch shìde ann.

*Our ancestors reckoned that the barn owl would foretell heavy rain. They would say 'the barn owl is calling sadly, floods are coming'. And people think, if they hear a blackbird calling loudly and sweetly, that it will rain.*

*The singing of the robin tells us if there is good weather or bad weather in prospect. When a robin is sitting in a bush or hedge, calling quietly, there will be bad weather. But on a summer's evening, even when it is cloudy, the bird's happy chirping tells us that there will be a good day the next day.*

*And what about one of the birds I like best – the skylark? If a lark sings on a wet day, it won't be long until the weather is dry.*

Bha ar sinnsearan dhen bheachd gun innseadh a' *Chomhachag* no *barn owl* nuair a bhiodh uisge mòr a' tighinn. Chanadh iad *Tha a' chomhachag ri bròn, thig tuiltean oirnn*. Agus tha daoine dhen bheachd, ma chluinneas iad *Lon-dubh* a' seinn gu h-àrd agus gu snasail, gum bi an t-uisge ann.

Bidh seinn a' *Bhrù-dheirg*, no *robin*, ag innse dhuinn co-dhiù 's e deagh aimsir no droch aimsir a tha romhainn. Nuair a bhios brù-dearg na shuidhe ann am preas no callaid, agus e a' gairm le guth beag, bidh droch shìde ann. Ach air feasgar samhraidh, eadhon ged a bhios e sgòthach, bidh seinn sunndach an eòin ag innse dhuinn gum bi deagh latha ann air an làrna-mhàireach.

Agus dè mu dheidhinn fear de na h-eòin as fheàrr leam – an *Uiseag*? Ma sheinneas *uiseag* air latha fliuch, chan fhada gus am bi turadh ann.