

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 234 (which corresponds to Litir 538). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I saw goats in the summer. I don't mean a farmer's goat. I mean wild goats on the hills.

I was walking in the deer forest of Letterewe. I was in Glen Bianas-dail. Close by there was Meallan Ghobhar [little rounded hill of the goats]. I saw tracks in the heather. The ground was steep. It is goats that made the paths.

My dog was ahead of me. He stopped. He was looking at something. It was a billy goat. The billy goat was big and had big horns.

I was reading an unusual thing about goats. The old people were saying that goats ate snakes. We have a proverb that concerns that. Alexander Nicolson collected that proverb for his book "Gaelic Proverbs".

Here is the proverb: The goat's trick is to eat the snake, eating away and still complaining. The goat's trick is to eat the snake, eating away and still complaining. The goat's trick is to eat the snake, eating away and still complaining.

Nicolson tells us that the Gaels

Chunnaic mi gobhair as t-samhradh. Chan eil mi a' ciallachadh gobhair aig tuathanach. Tha mi a' ciallachadh gobhair fhiadhaich anns a' mhonadh.

Bha mi a' coiseachd ann am Frìth Leitir Iù. Bha mi ann an Gleann Bianasdail. Faisg air làimh bha Meallan Ghobhar. Chunnaic mi ceumanna anns an fhraoch. Bha an talamh cas. 'S iad gobhair a rinn na ceumanna.

Bha an cù agam air thoiseach orm. Stad e. Bha e a' coimhead air rudeigin. 'S e boc gobhair a bha ann. Bha am boc mòr agus bha adharcan mòra air.

Bha mi a' leughadh rudeigin annasach mu ghobhair. Bha na seann daoine ag ràdh gun robh gobhair ag ithe nathraichean. Tha seanfhacal againn a tha a-mach air sin. Chruinnich Alasdair MacNeacail an seanfhacal sin airson an leabhair aige "Gaelic Proverbs".

Seo an seanfhacal: Cleas na goibhre 'g ith' na nathrach, ga sìor itheadh, 's a' sìor thalach. *The goat's trick is to eat the snake, eating away and still complaining.* Cleas na goibhre 'g ith' na nathrach, ga sìor itheadh, 's a' sìor thalach.

Tha MacNeacail ag innse dhuinn

– in some places at least – were of the opinion that goats ate snakes. To begin with a goat was stamping on a snake’s head. Then it was eating the snake. It started with the tail. While the goat was doing that, it was making a noise. It was like [it was] complaining.

I was wanting to find out if that is recorded in other places. I went to the wellspring of knowledge. What do I mean by that? “The wellspring of knowledge”. Aye – the internet.

There are videos on the internet of snakes eating goats. They’re not nice at all. But I found one account of a goat which ate a snake. There is a man in India. His name is Mohammed Pasha. Mohammed sells fish.

Mohammed had a goat. And the goat was eating the fish! One time, according to Mohammed, the goat ate a snake. Perhaps the proverb was telling the truth!

gun robh na Gàidheil – ann an cuid de cheàrnaidhean co-dhiù – dhen bheachd gun robh gobhair ag ithe nathraichean. An toiseach bha gobhar a’ stampadh air ceann nathrach. An uair sin bha e ag ithe na nathrach. Bha e a’ tòiseachadh leis an earball. Fhad ’s a bha gobhar a’ dèanamh sin, bha e a’ dèanamh fuaim. Bha e coltach ri bhith a’ talach no a’ gearain.

Bha mi ag iarraidh faighinn a-mach a bheil sin clàraichte ann an àiteachan eile. Chaidh mi gu màthair-uisge an fhiosrachaidh. Dè tha mi a’ ciallachadh le sin? “The wellspring of knowledge”. Seadh – an t-eadar-lìon.

Tha bhidiothan air an eadar-lìon de nathraichean ag ithe ghobhar. Chan eil iad snog idir. Ach lorg mi aon chunntas de ghobhar a dh’ith nathair. Tha fear anns na h-Innseachan. ’S e Mohammed Pasha an t-ainm a tha air. Bidh Mohammed a’ reic èisg.

Bha gobhar aig Mohammed. Agus bha an gobhar ag ithe an èisg! Aon turas, a rèir Mhohammed, dh’ith an gobhar nathair. ’S dòcha gur e an fhìrinn a tha anns an t-seanfhal!