

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 271 (which corresponds to Litir 575). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Have you ever heard about Seachd Cadalaichean an t-Saoghail? That's The Seven Sleepers of the Earth. Seachd Cadalaichean an t-Saoghail. I was reading a book about the Cairngorms. There was an old guy who was a stalker. He was speaking to the naturalist, Seton Gordon. He asked Gordon what the Seven Sleepers were.

Unfortunately only one of them was named. That was the small bird – the brù-gheal. People call it a wheatear or stonechacker in English. The old man was saying that the wheatear was spending the winter in Scotland. It was hibernating.

Why was the bodach thinking that? Well, he saw that bird at the mouth of a hole in the ground. That was in spring. He was thinking that the bird was coming out of the hole. The bird was waking at the end of the winter.

Gordon wasn't agreeing with him. There was evidence, he said, that the wheatear was going to foreign lands in winter. He was thinking that the bird was just resting at the mouth of the hole. It

An cuala sibh riamh mu *Sheachd Cadalaichean an t-Saoghail*? 'S e sin *The Seven Sleepers of the Earth*. Seachd Cadalaichean an t-Saoghail. Bha mi a' leughadh leabhar mun Mhonadh Ruadh. Bha bodach ann a bha na stalcaire. Bha e a' bruidhinn ris an eòlaiche-nàdair, Seton Gordon. Dh'fhaighnich e de Ghordon gu dè bha anns na Seachd Cadalaichean.

Gu mì-fhortanach chaidh dìreach aon dhiubh ainmeachadh. B' e sin eun beag – a' bhrù-gheal. 'S e wheatear no stonechacker a chanas daoine ris ann am Beurla. Bha am bodach ag ràdh gun robh a' bhrù-gheal a' cur seachad a' gheamhraidh ann an Alba. Bha i a' faighinn cadal a' gheamhraidh.

Carson a bha am bodach a' smaoinichadh sin? Uill, chunnaic e an t-eun sin aig beul tuill anns an talamh. Bha sin as t-earrach. Bha e a' smaoinichadh gun robh an t-eun a' tighinn a-mach às an toll. Bha an t-eun a' dùsgadh aig deireadh a' gheamhraidh.

Cha robh Gordon ag aontachadh ris. Bha fianais ann, thuirt e, gun robh a' bhrù-gheal a' dol gu tìrean cèin anns a' gheamhradh. Bha esan a' smaoinichadh gun robh an t-eun dìreach a' gabhail fois aig beul an tuill. Chan e

was not a “sleeper/hibernator”.

There is, or was, the Festival of the Seven Sleepers in the churches. But it's not the same Sleepers. The festival was based on a happening in Ephesus around the year 250 AD. Seven Christians were locked in a cave. Two hundred years after that, they were found. They were still alive. They had just been asleep. Those people were the Seven Sleepers. They were famous. The Church said that it was a miracle.

That's not what the bodach was meaning, however. He was talking about the seven creatures that spend the winter hibernating. I didn't get a list of those creatures from Scotland. But I did from the Isle of Man. And I'll tell you what the Seven Manx Sleepers are next week.

“cadalaiche” a bha ann.

Tha, no bha, Fèill nan Seachd Cadalaichean anns na h-eaglaisean. Ach chan e na h-aon Chadalaichean a tha ann. Bha an fhèill stèidhichte air tachartas ann an Ephesus timcheall na bliadhna 250 AC. Bha seachdnar Chrìosdaidhean air an glasadh ann an uamh. Dà cheud bliadhna às dèidh sin chaidh an lorg. Bha iad fhathast beò. Bha iad dìreach air a bhith nan cadal. B' iad na daoine sin na Seachd Cadalaichean. Bha iad ainmeil. Thuirt an Eaglais gur e mìorbhail a bha ann.

Chan e sin an rud a bha am bodach a' ciallachadh, ge-tà. Bha esan a' bruidhinn mu na seachd creutairean a tha a' cur seachad a' gheamhradh nan cadal. Cha d' fhuair mi liosta de na creutairean sin à Alba. Ach fhuair à Eilean Mhanainn. Agus innsidh mi dhuibh dè tha anns na Seachd Cadalaichean Manainneach an ath-sheachdain.