

An Litir Bheag le Ruairidh MacIleathain

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 376 (which corresponds to Litir 680). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

In front of me, there is a nice little book. It's about mammals in the Highlands. There is this in it: Feral Goat: unlikely to be confused with any other British mammal.

I'd say that's true. Goats are different from sheep. And they're different from roe deer and red deer. But perhaps it's not easy for everybody. In his book In The Shadow of Cairngorm, the Rev. Dr. William Forsyth gives an account of an English hunter. The hunter was thinking he had killed a roe deer. But it was a goat!

The word gobhar/gabhar is common in place-names. I found 106 examples on the Landranger maps. I found only 51 examples of the word fiadh [deer]. That's interesting in itself, isn't it?

Goats were more important at one time than they are now. They're not numerous like they once were.

Goats are originally native to the Middle East. It's thought that they came to Britain with the first farmers. That was in the Neolithic Age. But some left. They were living by themselves in the hills. Some still are.

Air mo bheulaibh, tha leabhar beag snog. Tha e mu mhamailean air a' Ghàidhealtachd. Tha seo ann: *Feral Goat: unlikely to be confused with any other British mammal.*

Chanainn gu bheil sin fìor. Tha gobhair eadar-dhealaichte bho chaoraich. Agus tha iad eadar-dhealaichte bho earbaichean agus fèidh. Ach 's dòcha nach eil e furasta don a h-uile duine. Anns an leabhar aige *In The Shadow of Cairngorm*, tha an t-Oll. Urr. Uilleam Fearsithe a' dèanamh aithris mu shealgair Sasannach. Bha an sealgair a' smaoineachadh gun do mharbh e earb. Ach 's e gobhar a bha ann!

Tha am facal *gobhar/gabhar* cumanta ann an ainmean-àite. Lorg mi ceud 's a sia eisimpleirean air na mapaichean Landranger. Lorg mi dìreach caogad 's a h-aon eisimpleirean dhen fhacal *fiadh*. Tha sin fhèin inntinneach, nach eil?

Bha gobhair na bu chudromaiche aig aon àm na tha iad a-nis. Chan eil iad pailt mar a bha iad uaireigin.

Tha gobhair dùthchasach bho thùs don Ear-mheadhanach. Thathar a' smaoineachadh gun tàinig iad a Bhreatainn leis na ciad tuathanaich. Bha sin ann an Nua-Linn na Cloiche. Ach dh'fhalbh feadhainn. Bha iad a' fuireach leotha fhèin anns a' mhonadh. Tha feadhainn ann fhathast.

People were hunting them. That was for meat, milk, hide and horns. Goats were valuable to the old Gaels. It was natural for them to name places for them.

They reached their maximum number at the end of the eighteenth century. Then the number of them fell. Some landlords were killing them.

There were different reasons for that. The landlords were wanting to protect forests. They were also of the opinion that goats spread ticks. The ticks damage grouse. The grouse are important for hunting. And many goats were killed for food during the two great wars in the twentieth century.

Bha daoine gan sealg. Bha sin airson feòil, bainne, bian agus adharcan. Bha gobhair luachmhor do na seann Ghàidheil. Bha e nàdarrach dhaibh àiteachan ainmeachadh air an son.

Ràinig iad an àireamh a bu mhotha aig deireadh an ochdamh linn deug. An uair sin, dh'islich an àireamh dhiubh. Bha cuid de dh'uachdarain gam marbhadh.

Bha diofar adhbharan airson sin. Bha na h-uachdarain ag iarraidh coilltean a dhìon. Bha iad cuideachd dhen bheachd gun sgaoil gobhair gartain. Nì na gartain cron air cearcan-fraoich. Tha cearcan-fraoich cudromach airson sealg. Agus bha mòran ghobhar air am marbhadh airson biadh anns an dà chogadh mhòr anns an fhicheadamh linn.