

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 518 (which corresponds to Litir 822). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you, last week, about the Pinguin – a German ship at the time of the Second [World] War. I drew that story from a book that came out some months ago – ‘Casan Searraich’ by Calum Fergusson. Calum belongs to Point on the Isle of Lewis.

It's an excellent book. It's fool of fun and full of beautiful Gaelic. In the book, Calum writes about Conky [big-nosed] Murdo. Who was Conky Murdo? Well, I'll tell you.

Calum was a young lad. He was ill. He was in bed with a chest infection. His mother came in and she asked him, ‘Can Skeddy and Conky Murdo come and see you?’

Calum said they could. He knew Skeddy – a local. But he didn't know Conky Murdo.

Skeddy came into the room. There was nobody with him, however.

‘Where is Conky Murdo?’ asked Calum.

Skeddy brought out a bird. The bird was alive. It was about

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh, an t-seachdain sa chaidh, mun Phinguin – long Ghearmailteach ri linn an Dàrna Cogaidh. Tharraing mi an sgeulachd sin à leabhar a thàinig a-mach o chionn beagan mhìosan – ‘Casan Searraich’ le Calum MacFhearghuis. Buinidh Calum don Rubha ann an Eilean Leòdhais.

’S e leabhar fìor mhath a tha ann. Tha e làn spòrs agus làn Gàidhlig bhrèagha. Anns an leabhar, tha Calum a’ sgrìobhadh mu Mhurchadh Sròineach. Cò bha ann am Murchadh Sròineach? Uill, innsidh mi dhuibh.

Bha Calum na ghille òg. Bha e tinn. Bha e sa leabaidh le brochan na bhroilleach. Thàinig a mhàthair a-steach agus chuir i a’ cheist air, ‘Am faod Sgeadaidh agus Murchadh Sròineach a thighinn a-nuas a shealltainn ort?’

Thuirte Calum gum faodadh. Bha e eòlach air Sgeadaidh – fear de mhuinntir an àite. Ach cha robh e eòlach air Murchadh Sròineach.

Thàinig Sgeadaidh a-steach don t-seòmar. Cha robh duine eile còmhla ris, ge-tà.

‘Càite a bheil Murchadh Sròineach?’ dh’fhaighnich Calum.

Thug Sgeadaidh eun a-mach. Bha an t-eun beò. Bha e mu mhead eireig –

the size of a pullet – a young hen. It was beautiful and multi-coloured. It had a big beak.

Skeddy spoke. ‘Here is Conky Murdo. Now, what do you think? Isn’t he handsome?’

‘He is beautiful,’ agreed Calum.

‘He had just bitten on bait when we were pulling in the small line,’ explained Skeddy.

Have you worked out yet what bird it was? It must be that they didn’t have a name for the like in Point, I don’t know. But Calum’s mother told him that a Tìree man, Dougie MacCallum, had a Gaelic name for it – buthaid. That’s the beautiful wee bird called ‘puffin’ in English.

They reckoned it was a young one. An adult one wouldn’t have bitten on a baited hook.

And what happened to Conky Murdo? Well, Skeddy took him down to the shore. He let him go so he’d find his way home ‘to his mother’. Although I suspect Murdo’s mother was quite unaware of his existence!

cearc òg. Bha e brèagha is iomadh-dhathte. Bha gob mòr air.

Bhruidhinn Sgeadaidh. ‘Seo agad Murchadh Sròineach. Nise, dè do bheachd? Nach eil e eireachdail?’

‘Tha e bòidheach,’ dh’aontaich Calum.

‘Bha e feidhir air grèim a ghabhail air baoit fhad ’s a bha sinn a’ tarraing an lìn-bhig,’ mhìnich Sgeadaidh.

An do dh’obraich sibh a-mach fhathast gu dè an t-eun a bha ann? Feumaidh nach robh ainm aca do a leithid anns an Rubha, chan eil fhios a’m. Ach dh’inns màthair Chaluum dha gun robh ainm Gàidhlig aig fear Tirisdeach, Dougaidh MacCaluim, dha – *buthaid*. ’S e sin an t-eun beag bòidheach ris an canar *puffin* ann am Beurla.

Bha iad dhen bheachd gur e fear òg a bha ann. Cha bhiodh fear aig ìre inbhich a’ gabhail grèim le a bheul air dubhan le baoit air.

Agus dè thachair do Mhurchadh Sròineach? Uill, thug Sgeadaidh sìos don chladach e. Leig e às e gus am faigheadh e dhachaigh ‘gu a màthair’. Ged a tha amharas agam nach robh for aig màthair Mhurchaidh don ‘ghille’ aice!