

# 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 553 (which corresponds to Litir 857). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk).

Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go, Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go... What bird makes a sound like that? Do you know?

*The swan. And here is The Song of the Swan in its entirety.*

Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go,  
Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go,  
Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go,  
Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go,

My black legs,  
My black legs,  
My black legs,  
And myself quite white.

My nest was destroyed,  
My nest was destroyed,  
My nest was destroyed,  
And myself in Ireland

*We'll return to Ireland shortly. The Gaels reckon the song of the swan to be extremely melodious. There is a saying – it's sweeter than the song of the swan.*

*Do you know the word lear? It's an ancient word, meaning 'sea'. Its form in the genitive case is lir. Perhaps some of you will have heard the old story – Clann Lir –*

Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go, Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go... Dè an t-eun a tha a' dèanamh fuaim mar sin? A bheil e agaibh?

An eala. Agus seo agaibh Òran na h-Eala air fad.

Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go,  
Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go,  
Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go,  
Gu-bhi-gi, gu-bhi-go,

Mo chasan dubh,  
Mo chasan dubh,  
Mo chasan dubh,  
'S mi fhìn glè gheal.

*Chreachadh mo nead,  
Chreachadh mo nead,  
Chreachadh mo nead,  
'S mi fhìn an Èirinn*

Tillidh sinn gu Èirinn an ceartuair. Tha na Gàidheil a' tomhas gu bheil guileag na h-eala cho binn 's a ghabhas. Tha abairt ann – *Is binne e na guileag na h-eala.*

A bheil sibh eòlach air an fhacal lear? 'S e facal àrsaidh a th' ann, a' ciallachadh 'muir'. 'S e a dhreach anns an tuiseal ghinideach – *lir*. 'S dòcha gu bheil cuid agaibh air an seann stòiridh a

*literally 'the children of the sea'. The Lear in the story is a pagan god – the sea god. Often it is translated as the Children of Lir, although it should really be the Children of Lear. The swan appears in this story.*

*The Children of Lear is better known in Ireland than it is in Scotland. But the Gaels of Scotland know it a bit. Part of it takes place in the Straits of Moyle. That's the sea strait near the Mull of Kintyre – between Scotland and Ireland.*

*Here is a shortened version of the Children of Lear. In olden times, the Gaels believed in different gods. Lear was the lord of the sea. He was married and had four children. The two eldest of them were Fionnuala and Aodh. One day they went to swim in a loch.*

*They were good at swimming. They had gills that would allow them to breathe under the water as does a fish. And they had webbed feet that allowed them to swim as well as ... well, as well as a swan. That ought not to be a surprise because they were the children of the 'king of the land under [the] waves'. I'll continue with the story next week.*

chluinntinn – *Clann Lir* – gu litreachail 'the sea children'. 'S e an *Lear* anns an sgeulachd dia pàganach – dia na mara. Gu tric bithear a' dèanamh eadar-theangachadh air mar *The Children of Lir*, ged as e *The Children of Lear* a bu chòir a bhith ann. Tha an eala anns an sgeulachd seo.

Tha *Clann Lir* nas aithnichte ann an Èirinn na tha ann an Alba. Ach tha Gàidheil na h-Alba car eòlach air. Tha pàirt dhith a' gabhail àite ann an Sruth na Maoile. 'S e sin an caolas mara faisg air Maol Chinn Tìre – eadar Alba agus Èirinn.

Seo agaibh geàrr-chunntas de Chlann Lir. Anns an t-seann aimsir, bha na Gàidheil a' creidsinn ann an diofar dhiathan. B' e *Lear* tighearna na mara. Bha e pòsta agus bha ceathrar cloinne aige. B' iad an dithis a bu shine dhiubh Fionnuala agus Aodh. Latha a bha seo chaidh iad a shnàmh ann an loch.

Bha iad math air snàmh. Bha giùrain orra a leigeadh leotha anail a ghabhail fon uisge mar a ghabhas iasg. Agus bha spògan-snàmha orra a leigeadh leotha snàmh cho math ri ... uill, cho math ri eala. Cha bu chòir sin a bhith na iongnadh oir bha iad nan cloinn aig 'rìgh na tìr fo thuinn'. Leanaidh mi leis an sgeulachd an-ath-sheachdain.