

# **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 574 (which corresponds to Litir 878). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk).

*I was telling you about 'the year of the sheep'. But when was 'the year of the mice'? You've never heard of it? Well, 'the year of the mice' was 1815. It wasn't recognised as such in Scotland. It was, however, in Nova Scotia in Canada.*

*In that year, a fantastic number of mice appeared. Nobody knew where they had come from or why they were so numerous. As soon as the wheat had grown up, the farmers found out that the mice had damaged the roots.*

*A poem was written in Gaelic about 'the year of the mice'. Here's how it begins:*

There are many plunderers here  
Among the farmers:  
Bears, merchants and bureaucrats,  
constantly taking from them:  
The mice are so plentiful  
That they don't leave seed on the  
sheaf tops;  
And the little of it that is protected  
Will be of poor quality when it  
comes to threshing.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Bhliadhna nan Caorach. Ach cuin a bha Bliadhna nan Luch? Cha chuala sibh riamh oirre? Uill, b' e Bliadhna nan Luch – the year of the mice – ochd ceud deug is còig-deug (1815). Cha robh i aithnichte mar sin ann an Alba. Bha, ge-ta, ann an Alba Nuaidh ann an Canada.

Anns a' bhliadhna sin, nochd an t-uabhas de luchan. Cha robh fios aig duine cò as a thàinig iad no carson a bha iad cho pailt. Cho luath 's a bha a' chruithneachd air fàs suas, fhuair na tuathanaich a-mach gun robh na luchan air sgrios a dhèanamh air na freumhaichean.

Chaidh dàn a sgrìobhadh ann an Gàidhlig mu dheidhinn Bliadhna nan Luch. Seo mar a tha e a' tòiseachadh:

*Is iomadh creachadair an taobh-s'  
Am measg na tuathadh:  
Mathain, marsantan is maoir,  
A' sìor thoirt uatha:  
Tha luchaidhean ann cho lìonmhor  
'S nach fhàg iad sìol air bàrr  
sguaibe;  
Is am beagan a thèid fo dhìon dheth  
Is bochd a bhrìgh 'n àm a'  
bhualaidh.*

*It's not certain who wrote the poem. It appeared under the nom de plume 'I.P.' in the magazine 'An Cuairtear Òg Gàidhealach'. Perhaps it was a man – Iain 'Piper' MacGillivray.*

*In the next section, he wishes death upon the mice:*

[May] an everlasting curse from the people of all lands  
Lower the numbers of that species;  
Boils, cats, buzzards, winter cold,  
Death and weakness in every way to them;  
You bear the malice of all of Adam's offspring  
And no living person has affection for you,  
I'm sorry you were not drowned  
Before you got into Noah's Ark.

*I don't know how many people remember the year of the mice today. It's Michael Newton that brought the matter to my attention. He has an account about this poem in his book that came out last year – Seanchaidh na Coille: The Memory-Keeper of the Forest'. It's a collection of Canadian literature in Gaelic. The book proves how valuable the Gaelic heritage of Canada is. I'll tell you more about this book next week.*

Chan eil fios le cinnt cò sgrìobh an dàn. Nochd e fon ainm pinn 'I.P.' anns an iris 'An Cuairtear Òg Gàidhealach'. 'S dòcha gur e fear a bh' ann – Iain 'Pìobaire' MacGhilleBhrath.

Anns an ath earrainn, tha e a' guidhe bàs air na luchan:

*Mallachd bhuan o shluagh gach dùthcha  
Lughdachadh cunntais an t-seòrs' ud;  
Neasgaidean, cait, clamhain,  
dùldachd,  
Bàs is fanntachadh 's gach dòigh dhuibh;  
Is leibh gamhlas uile shliochd Adhaimh  
'S chan eil bàigh aig neach a tha beò ribh,  
Is duilich leam nach deach ur bàthadh  
Mun d' fhuair sibh san Àirc aig Nòa.*

Chan eil fhios a'm cia mhead duine a tha a' cuimhneachadh Bliadhna nan Luch an-diugh. 'S e Mìcheal Newton a thug a' chùis gu m' aire. Tha cunntas aige mun dàn seo anns an leabhar aige a thàinig a-mach an-uiridh – 'Seanchaidh na Coille: The Memory-Keeper of the Forest'. 'S e cruinneachadh a tha ann de litreachas Chanada ann an Gàidhlig. Tha an leabhar a' dearbhadh cho priseil 's a tha dualchas Gàidhlig Chanada. Innsidh mi tuilleadh mun leabhar seo an-ath-sheachdain.