

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 587 (which corresponds to Litir 891). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Is sleamhainn a' chlach a tha an ursainn an taigh mhòir. *Have you ever heard that proverb? Is sleamhainn a' chlach a tha an ursainn an taigh mhòir. Literally, it means 'slippery is the stone that is next to the doorpost of the big house'. But it is equivalent to the English – 'the powerful make fickle friends'. Be careful if you have powerful friends. Perhaps they'll not be as straightforward or as loyal as you were expecting. Is sleamhainn a' chlach a tha an ursainn an taigh mhòir.*

I'm contemplating the word 'sleamhainn' this week. In English, people say 'as slippery as an eel'. We have the same simile in Gaelic. Cho sleamhainn ri easgann. As slippery as an eel. Cho sleamhainn ri easgann.

I did Biology at university. One day, a team of us measured the fish in a river. We took with us equipment to stun fish. It created an electric field in the water. When the fish were in the field they were unconscious for a minute or two. Thjy floated on the surface of the river. And we were catching them

Is sleamhainn a' chlach a tha an ursainn an taigh mhòir. An cuala sibh an seanfhacal sin riamh roimhe? Is sleamhainn a' chlach a tha an ursainn an taigh mhòir. Gu litreachail, tha e a' ciallachadh 'slippery is the stone that is next to the doorpost of the big house'. Ach tha e co-ionann ris a' Bheurla – 'the powerful make fickle friends'. Thoiribh an aire ma tha caraidean cumhachdach agaibh. 'S dòcha nach bi iad cho dìreach no cho dìleas 's a bha sibh an dùil. Is sleamhainn a' chlach a tha an ursainn an taigh mhòir.

Tha mi a' meòrachadh air an fhacal *sleamhainn* an t-seachdain seo. Ann am Beurla, bidh daoine ag ràdh '*as slippery as an eel*'. Tha an aon samhla againn an Gàidhlig. *Cho sleamhainn ri easgann. As slippery as an eel. Cho sleamhainn ri easgann.*

Rinn mi Bith-eòlas aig an oilthigh. Aon latha, rinn sgioba againn tomhas air na h-èisg ann an abhainn. Thug sinn leinn uidheamachd airson èisg a chur o mhothachadh. Bha i a' cruthachadh raon dealain anns an uisge. Nuair a bha na h-èisg anns an raon bha iad gun mhothachadh airson mionaid no dhà. Bha iad a' dol air fleòdradh air

with a tàbh [hand-net] – a little net.

The man who was in charge asked – who was willing to measure the length of the eels with a ruler? Nobody else was willing. I was chosen. The work was unpleasant!

The electricity wasn't having the same effect on the eels that it was on the other fish. They were unconscious for only ten or twenty seconds. Then they were wanting to swim again. And my job was to measure their length. But they were strong – and slippery. It wasn't long until my hands were full of fish slime. It was awful!

Here are two other similes connected to the word 'sleamhainn'. Cho sleamhainn ri botal. As slippery as a bottle. Cho sleamhainn ri botal. And cho sleamhainn ri glainneachan. As slippery as drinking glasses. Cho sleamhainn ri glainneachan. Cheerio just now.

uachdar na h-aibhne. Agus bha sinn gan glacadh le tàbh – lìon beag.

Dh'fhaighnich am fear a bha os cionn a' ghnothaich – cò bha deònach fad nan easgannan a thomhas le rèilear? Cha robh duine sam bith eile deònach. Chaidh mo thaghadh-sa. Bha an obair mì-thlachdmhor!

Cha robh an dealan a' bualadh uiread air na h-easgannan 's a bha e air na h-èisg eile. Bha iad gun mhothachadh airson dìreach deich no fichead diog. An uair sin bha iad ag iarraidh snàmh a-rithist. Agus b' e m' obair-sa am fad a thomhas. Ach bha iad làidir – agus sleamhainn. Cha b' fhada gus an robh mo làmhan làn rannain – no fish slime. Bha e sgriosail!

Seo agaibh dà shamhla eile co-cheangailte ris an fhacal 'sleamhainn'. *Cho sleamhainn ri botal. As slippery as a bottle. Cho sleamhainn ri botal. Agus cho sleamhainn ri glainneachan. As slippery as drinking glasses. Cho sleamhainn ri glainneachan. Mar sin leibh an-dràsta.*