

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 600 (which corresponds to Litir 904). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

There is a booklet in front of me just now. It was originally published in 1872. It's called [in Gaelic] 'Accounts of New Zealand for Migrants'. It was written by the Rev. P. Barclay and translated into Gaelic.

So many Gaels were considering emigrating to New Zealand that it was worth publishing a booklet in their own language. But it's worth remembering this. The booklet appeared in the same year that the Education Act went through the parliament. Before that, many in the Highlands were receiving a bilingual education. They were able to read their own language. The state education system put paid to that.

Here is a small passage from the booklet. [The land of New Zealand was] amazingly empty of animals until within the last century. It appears that there was no native mammal, except small rats which the European rats caused to become extinct...'

The translator uses 'beò-ainmhidh' for 'mammal' and he

Tha leabhran air mo bheulaibh an-dràsta. Chaidh fhoillseachadh an toiseach o chionn fhada – ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a dhà (1872). 'S e an tiotal a th' air 'Geàrr-chunntasan air New Zealand airson Feuma Luchd-imrich'. Bha e air a sgrìobhadh leis an Urramach P. Barclay agus air eadar-theangachadh gu Gàidhlig.

Bha uiread de Ghàidheil a' beachdachadh air imrich a dhèanamh gu ruige New Zealand 's gum b' fhiach leabhran fhoillseachadh anns a' chànan aca fhèin. Ach 's fhiach seo a chuimhneachadh. Nochd an leabhran anns an dearbh bhliadhna 's a chaidh Achd an Fhoghlaim tron phàrlamaid. Roimhe sin, bha mòran air a' Ghàidhealtachd a' faighinn foghlam dà-chànanach. Bha comas leughaidh aca ann an Gàidhlig. Chuir siostam foghlaim na stàite às dha sin.

Seo earrann bheag bhon leabhran. '[Bha fearann New Zealand] anabarrach falamh a dh'ainmhidhean gus an taobh a-staigh dhen cheud bliadhna mu dheireadh. Tha e glè choltach nach robh beò-ainmhidh a bhuineadh don dùthaich, ach radain bheaga dhan do chuir na radain Europeanach às ...'

Tha an t-eadar-theangair a' cleachdadh 'beò-ainmhidh' airson

writes 'Europeanach' for 'Eruopean'. Today we say 'Eòrpach'.

The account continues: 'A timid type of ostrich-like bird was caused to become extinct, and other types are rapidly becoming less common as immigrants spread.' It's interesting that the translator put the English 'ostrich-like' in. He reckoned that not everybody would understand the phrase 'struth-chosmhail'. I'd say he was right.

The book tells us that '... most British songbirds found their way to New Zealand; and since the rook was introduced recently, the homesteads, particularly those [the portion] that are surrounded by trees, are very like British dwellings.

I'll mention one other thing from Mr Barclay's account. 'Fortunately,' he reports, 'there are no poisonous snakes nor harmful beast of any sort there. The land is as free from the like as Ireland.' And that's true to this day. Goodbye.

'mammal' agus tha e a' sgrìobhadh 'Europeanach' airson 'European'. An-diugh, bidh sinn ag ràdh 'Eòrpach'.

Tha an cunntas a' leantainn: 'Chaidh às do sheòrs' eòin athach, struth-chosmhail (*ostrich-like*), agus tha seòrsachan eile a' teireachdainn gu bras mar a tha luchd-imrich a' faotainn air adhart.' Tha e inntinneach gun do chuir an t-eadar-theangair a' Bheurla '*ostrich-like*' ann. Bha e an dùil nach tuigeadh a h-uile duine an abairt 'struth-chosmhail'. Chanainn gun robh e ceart.

Tha an leabhran ag innse dhuinn gun '...d' fhuair a' chuid as motha de dh'eòin cheòlmhor Bhreatainn gu ruige New Zealand; agus on a thugadh an ròcas ann o chionn ghoirid, bidh na h-ionadan-tàimh, gu h-àraidh a' chuid a th' air an cuairteachadh le craobhan, gu math coltach ri àrosan Breatannach.'

Ainmichidh mi aon rud eile às a' chunntas aig Mgr Barclay. 'Gu fortanach,' tha e ag aithris, 'chan eil nathraichean nimheil no biast dhochannach sam bith ann. Tha an tìr cho saor on leithidean 's a tha Èirinn fhèin.' Agus tha sin fìor chun an latha an-diugh. Beannachd leibh.