

# 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 802 (which corresponds to Litir 1,106). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk).

*I'm thinking about the wren. I was on the hills in summer – at the edge of Inverness. I was resting behind a bush of heather. A wren was flying around me. It was calling and complaining.*

*And what was it saying? Well, the old people were putting these words in the mouth of the wren:*

*Come, come, come, oh beggar, come come, come oh mite; the other birds are all mites, except for me myself, except for me myself, mites, mites.*

*Gillean-frìde – mites, little wee things. The wren calls the other birds 'mites' as if it were a big bird itself! The Gaels were ever of the view that the wren had a high opinion of itself.*

*We can see that in the proverb: Is bigid e sin, is bigid e sin, mar a thuir an dreathan-donn, nuair a thug e làn a ghuib às a' mhuir 'tis the less for that, 'tis the less for that, as the wren said, when it sipped a bill-full from the sea.' Is bigid e sin, is bigid e sin, mar a thuir an dreathan-donn, nuair a thug e làn a ghuib às a' mhuir.*

Tha mo smuaintean air an dreathan-donn. Bha mi sa mhonadh as t-samhradh – air iomall Inbhir Nis. Bha mi a' gabhail fois air cùl preas fraoich. Bha dreathan-donn air sgèith mu mo thimcheall. Bha e ag èigheachd 's a' gearan.

Agus dè bha e ag ràdh? Uill, bha na seann daoine a' cur nam faclan seo ann am beul an dreathain-duinn:

*Thig, thig, thig a dhiol-dèirce, Thig thig, thig a ghille-frìde; Is gillean-frìde na h-eòin uile, Ach mise leam fhìn, Ach mise leam fhìn, Gillean-frìde, gillean-frìde.*

Gillean-frìde – mites, rudan beaga bìodach. Tha an dreathan-donn a' gabhail 'gillean-frìde' air na h-eòin eile mar gur e eun mòr a tha ann fhèin! Bha na Gàidheil riamh dhen bharrail gu bheil deagh bheachd aig an dreathan-donn air fhèin.

Chì sinn sin anns an t-seanfhacl: Is bigid e sin, is bigid e sin, mar a thuir an dreathan-donn, nuair a thug e làn a ghuib às a' mhuir 'tis the less for that, 'tis the less for that, as the wren said, when it sipped a bill-full from the sea.' Is bigid e sin, is bigid e sin, mar a thuir an dreathan-donn, nuair a thug e làn a ghuib às a' mhuir.

*There is a well-known anecdote about the struggle between the wren and the golden eagle. The eagle was boasting. 'I'll fly higher than any other bird,' it said.*

*None of the other birds were willing to go against it. Well, none, except the wren. 'Be quiet, I can go higher than you,' said the wren.*

*'You? You!' said the eagle. 'You are just a weak chick. I'll be looking down on you, when I am aloft on the wing.'*

*'Go on, then,' said the wren. The eagle ascended. It was far above the ground. There was no sign of the wren!*

*And now the conversation [which rhymes in Gaelic]: Where are you, wren?*

*'I'm here, above you!' The wren was on the eagle's back. It was so light that the eagle didn't notice it. And, indeed, it was higher than the eagle!*

Tha naidheachd ainmeil mun strì eadar an dreathan-donn agus an iolair-bhuidhe. Bha an iolair a' bòstadh. 'Thèid mise air sgèith nas àirde na eun sam bith eile,' thuirt i.

Cha robh gin de na h-eòin eile deònach a dhol na h-aghaidh. Uill, cha robh, ach a-mhàin an dreathan-donn. 'Ist, 's urrainn dhòmhsa dhol nas àirde na thu fhèin,' thuirt an dreathan.

'Thusa? Thusa!' ars an iolair. 'Chan eil annad ach isean lag. Bidh mi a' coimhead sìos ort, nuair a tha mi shuas àrd air sgèith.'

'Siuthad, ma-thà,' ars an dreathan-donn. Chaidh an iolair an-àirde. Bha i fada os cionn na talmhainn. Cha robh sgeul air an dreathan!

Agus a-nise an còmhradh: 'Càite a bheil thu, 'dhreathain-duinn?'

'Tha mi 'n seo, os do chinn!' Bha an dreathan-donn air druim na h-iolaire. Bha e cho aotrom 's nach do mhothaich an iolair dha. Agus, gu dearbh, bha e na b' àirde na 'n iolair!