

Saoghal na Gàidhlig...

The Gaelic way of living in the world

An do smaoinich sibh a-riamh carson a tha a' Ghàidhlig 's a dualchas cho tarraingeach do dhaoine's gun tòisich iad air a' Ghàidhlig 'ionnsachadh? 'S e ùghdar is seinneadair Uilleam Ó Conaill, a rugadh ann a' Gleann Ottawa agus a tha a-nis 'na thàmh air a' Chladach a Tuath, Ceap Breatainn, aon dhiùbh sin.

Tha muinntir de mhórchuid dhe na sliochdan Ceilteach ri 'm faighinn ann a' Gleann Ottawa. Ach mar a thuir Uilleam: "Fhad 's fhiosrach mi, cha robh a' Ghàidhlig ann mar chàin a chluinneadh tu...cha mhór gun cuala mi gu robh a leithid ann mas d' thàinig mi a' seo, agus cha b' ann idir mar chàin bheò. Nuair a ràinig sinn Ceap Breatainn, agus a thuig sinn gu robh coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig gu deimhinne ann, chuir mi romham gun toirinn ionnsaidh air a' chàin mar shuairceas dha na daoine còir' a chuir fàil' oirn!"

Uidh air n-uidh, dh'ionnsaich Uilleam cho cudthromach 's a tha a' Ghàidhlig do dh' eachdraidh na h-Albann Nuaidhe, gu h-àraidh ann a' Ceap Breatainn: "Agus leis a' chàin thàinig a dualchas—mar a bheir nàbaidhean an aire air a chéile, mar a mheasas iad talamh is uisgeachan, mar a bheir urram aig àm bàis 's a' choimhearsnachd stad a chur air a h-uile sion, mar a chithear fhàthast na tallaichean beaga coimhearsnachd air an cur gu feum.....Air sgàth's gu robh coimhearsnachd Cheap Breatainn air an iomall rè pàirt mhath dhen 20mh linn, tha na cleachdaidhean a bh' aig na tusairean Gàidhealach nuair a shuidhich iad 's an àite air an cumail suas le barrachd brìgh a' seo na ann an àit' eile a chunnaic mi riamh....."

Seach gur e fear-ciùil is sgrìobhadair gleusda a th' ann an Uilleam, agus a rèir choltais gum biodh dìoghràs aige air faclan, abairtean is gnàthasan-cainnt, dh' fhoighnich mi dha dé 'n dàimh a chunnaic e eadar an sgrìobhadh aige agus a' Ghàidhlig. Nochd gné bhàrdail an duine 'na fhreagairt:

"Dh' fhaoidte nach eil 'dìoghràs' 'na fhacal mór gu leòr! Bha cainnt dhreachmhor, cainnt phongail, agus cainnt neo-phongail air a cur gu feum gu smaointeachail, a' riamh a' còrdadh rium gu mór.....faclan a bheireadh dhut tuairisgeul, snas, doimhneachd, cliù dhuine, àbhachd, drùidhteachd, tuigse, mothachadh—agus dìoghràs. 'S urrainn dha na h-Éireannaich 's na h-Albannaich, agus dha na daoine dùthchail a' seo, sgeul 'innse agus bheir iad air 'anail a tharraing, bheir iad air dannsa 's seinn, leis a bhith a' taghadh fhaclan gu cùramach bho stòras nas fharsaing na tha cumanta. A thuilleadh air sin, bidh torghan na càin a' cur blas anns a' sgeul nach cluinnear idir ann a' Canada Uarach no ann a' dùthaich nan Gearrach".

'S coltach gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig 's a dualchas a' tarraing air fuil an Éireannaich a th' ann an Uilleam Ó Conaill—mar bu chòir; agus tha an tuairisgeul deàrach aige orra a' toirt beachd dhuinn air cho cumhachdach 's a tha an tarraing.

Have you ever wondered why people find Gaelic culture attractive, so much so that they begin learning the language? One such person is writer and singer Bill Conall who now lives on Cape Breton's North Shore.

Descendants of almost all the Celtic peoples are represented in the Ottawa Valley. But as Bill said: "There was no active Gaelic language there to my knowledge....I had rarely heard of Gaelic before I came here, and not at all as a living language. When we arrived in Cape Breton and found that there was indeed a Gaelic community, I decided that as a courtesy to my hosts I would take a stab at learning the language!"

Bill began to learn of the important place Gaelic has had in the history of Nova Scotia, especially in Cape Breton: "And with the language came the culture that grew out of it: the concern for neighbours, the respect for the land and the waters, the caring that brings everything to a halt in respect for a death in the community, the fact of the many little community halls still in existence and in operation....Because of the isolation of Cape Breton communities well into the 20th century, the customs are carried on with more vigour than any other place I have ever been, continuing traditions established by the original Gaelic settlers and followed by their descendants...."

Since Bill is an accomplished musician and writer, and presumably passionate about words, expressions, idioms, I asked him what connection he saw between his writing and the Gaelic language. His response evoked the poetic nature of the man:

"'Passionate' may not be a large enough word! I have always loved colourful language, precise language, vague language carefully used..... Not just words for the sake of filling space, but words of description, colour, depth, character, humour, pathos, understanding, sensitivity, and passion. The Irish and the Scots and the locals can tell a story and make it breathe, dance and sing by carefully selected words from a wider-than-normal vocabulary. Also the lilt of the language adds a flavour that isn't there in the speech of Upper Canada or the Yankee north".

It appears that Bill Conall's Irish blood responds to the Gaelic and its culture quite as it should; and his own vivid description of them evokes some of their powerful appeal.

The Gaelic Way of Living in the World is written by Catriona Parsons and sponsored by...

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Office of Gaelic Affairs
Oifis Iomairtean na Gàidhlig

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

A recent Saturday field trip with the Cape Breton chapter of the Nova Scotia Bird Society proved to be a most worthwhile event! Although there were only a dozen or so birders willing to brave the sub-zero temperatures and go out and explore, under crisp, clear winter skies, the environs of Glace Bay Harbour, and although only 5 of us continued on to Schooner Cove and eventually to Donkin, the birds more than made up for the rather small turnout. The day's standout was hard to determine after all was said and done as there were several rather remarkable sightings including the presence of a tufted duck (please see below) at the mouth of Reynolds Brook among a large group of greater and lesser scaup. And that was merely the beginning, or rather part two of the beginning.

On the open water off Fishermen's Park a black scoter caused quite a stir. Although white-winged and surf scoter are routinely found on Atlantic waters all the way around Cape Breton Island from Margaree Harbour to Port Hawkesbury, black scoter is quite another matter. Our least-often seen scoter, this sea duck is slightly more compact than its first cousins and its uniformly-black plumage is broken only by the presence of, in the male of the species, a knobbed and bright orange-red bill. The female is uniformly brown with pale cheeks, upper throat and neck. Also at the same location were a smattering of common black-headed gull looking quite naked in their winter plumage, their crisp black caps of breeding season reduced to small cheek

smudges. Adjacent to the breakwater was a large mixed raft of greater and lesser scaup, a good showing of bufflehead, common and red-breasted merganser and, farther off-shore, riding the gentle swells, a small, loose raft of common goldeneye. Naturally, there were a small number of American black duck there as well as a single, first-year common eider, several black guillemot, a good number of long-tail duck, elegant as ever, a large number of American widgeon and, among the herring and great black-backed gull, Iceland gull, their unmarked, crisp white plumage nicely catching the sun as they wheeled and soared. Landward, a small flock of Bohemian waxwing were a nice spot of colour in a rather stout shrub where, nearby, a small flock of European starling chirped and whistled to one another.

When our group moved around to another vantage point at the mouth of Reynolds Brook, many of the species named above were present there as well, both on the open water of the Brook and out on the adjacent Atlantic. However, there was a great whoop of excitement with the overhead passing of, of all things, a northern flicker! My first ever winter sighting of this ground-forag-

ing member of the woodpecker family. A juvenile (4th year) American bald eagle paid us no heed as it faced seaward and did its best to ignore us; ditto the house sparrow flitting nearby, in and out of a thick hedge. But what made this stop memorable was the tufted duck. A member of the genus *Aythya* (think ring-necked duck), tufted duck are an Old World species arriving in our area after crossing the Arctic regions. Typical of its genus, the tufted duck has a relatively short, broad bill that is dark blue in colour with the typical black nail. Tufted duck closely resembles scaup, to which it is related, and shows a black head, black

back, breast and tail, white sides, a bright yellow eye and a distinctive drooping crest arising just below its crown. Female tufted duck also sport this rakish head feathering, although somewhat less dramatic, shorter and more compact. Female tufted duck sport a very dark, chocolate-brown head that gives way to a black back and rich brown neck, throat and sides. Tufted duck are approximately 17" in length and, Dave McCorquodale shared with the group, our sighting of the male at Glace Bay is only the third recorded sighting of this Palearctic duck in the entire province of Nova Scotia!

A short stop at the end of Shore Road near the hospital turned up a pair of Savannah sparrow foraging on the rack there and the presence of a single ring-billed gull, our only migrant gull usually far to the south by this time of year, was a surprise for everyone.

No one thought that the tufted duck sighting could be topped but a near-second occurred on the way to Schooner Cove when a turkey vulture soared above the

highway and followed the blacktop for a considerable distance. Although all three vehicles in our small convoy were nearly ditched in the drivers' efforts not to lose sight of this carrion eater rarely seen in Cape Breton, there were, thankfully, no accidents and we all managed to extricate ourselves in plenty of time to get some excellent views of it. Turkey vulture are all black above and below, with the exception of the wide band of grey in its underwings and its grey tail. The diagnostic red, bald head was not visible due to its angle of flight and the fact that, sadly, it was flying away from us. However, it had its primaries fully extended and slightly above the horizontal, the feathers spread out like large, many-fingered hands, typical of its flight behavior.

Schooner Cove did not disappoint, as many of the sea duck species noted earlier in the day were present there. However, we did not linger in the strengthening winds and forged on to Donkin where a pair of purple sandpiper and a juvenile double-crested cormorant finished our day and what a day it was!

I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.



NORTHERN FLICKER



TUFTED DUCK

ELLIOTT K. FRASER, LL.B.

Barrister • Solicitor • Notary Public

8565 Highway 105, Baddeck Nova Scotia

Tel: (902) 295-1622 • Fax: (902) 295-2847

E-mail: elliott.fraser@ns.sympatico.ca