



In the first of a series of Gaelic articles (each with a summary in English) on the close relationship between our language and Scotland's environment, Ruairidh MacIleathain looks at a



plant with a strong connection to Saint Columba.

Lus Chaluim Chille

Tha lus a bhuineas don genus *Hypericum* a' giùlain ainm naomh a tha air leth cudromach do na Gàidheil – Calum Cille. 'S e *Hypericum pulchrum* lus Chaluim Chille. Ann am Beurla canar *slender St John's-wort* ris. Carson a tha an dà shluagh a' ceangal an luis seo ri dà naomh eadar-dhealaichte?

Tha e coltach gu bheil na h-ainmean co-cheangailte ri meadhan an t-samhraidh. 'S e Latha Fèill Eòin 24 Ògmhios – àm math airson an lus seo a bhuain. Ach, mus deach am miosachan ùrachadh ann an 1582, bha Latha Fèill Chaluim Chille (9 Ògmhios) air gluasad air adhart gu 21 Ògmhios – grian-stad an t-samhraidh. Mas e am miosachan as coireach ri ainm Gàidhlig an luis, ge-tà, tha beul-aithris air an ceangal a neartachadh gu mòr.

Anns an 21mh linn tha mòran a' cleachdadh *Hypericum* mar leigheas, gu h-àraidh airson trom-intinn. Bha na Gàidheil fhathast a' cleachdadh lus Chaluim Chille gu mòr anns an 19mh linn an aghaidh buidseachd agus airson sìthe is pailteas a bhith anns an taigh. Bhiodh fir agus mnathan ga ghiùlain fon achlais chli – às am faigheadh na stuthan ceimigeach a-steach don bhodhaig. Ach, airson a bhith èifeachdach, a rèir beul-aithris, dh'fheumte an lus a lorg "gun sireadh 's gun iarraidh".

Tha sin gar toirt gu ainm eile air *Hypericum pulchrum* – achlasan Chaluim Chille. Tha achlasan a' ciallachadh "pasgan beag a chuirear fon achlais". Tha grunn stòiridhean ann à beul-aithris mun ainm seo. Tha fear dhiubh ag innse mu ghille a bha na chiobair. Bha an t-eagal air ron oidhche, agus e a-muigh leis na caoraich. Thug Calum Cille badan dhen lus seo dha agus dh'iarr e air a chur fo achlais. Rinn an gille sin agus cha robh an t-eagal air tuilleadh.

Tha stòiridh eile ann gur e Calum Cille fhèin a chuireadh an lus seo fo achlais – ann an sporan leathair. Thug an lus spionnadh is neart don naomh agus, mar sin, 's dòcha gun do dh'atharraich e eachdraidh na h-Alba!

The slender St John's-wort, *Hypericum pulchrum*, is linked to St Columba, rather than St John, in Gaelic tradition. It's still known as *lus Chaluim Chille* (Columba's plant).

The connection might stem from the fact that each saint's feast day occurs in midsummer, when this plant – used traditionally in Scotland against witchcraft and to ensure peace and plenty – is ready to harvest.

Gaelic tradition says it's most effective when happened upon accidentally. It was traditionally placed under the left oxter, from where chemicals could enter the bloodstream, and this gives the species a secondary name of *achlasan Chaluim Chille* (Columba's small armpit package).

Whatever the origin of the name, oral tradition has handed down a number of stories that link Gaelic Scotland's most important saint to this plant.

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Lus Chaluim Chille no achlasan Chaluim Chille – tha an lus seo ceangailte gu làidir ris an naomh as ainmeile ann an eachdraidh nan Gàidheal Albannach.

Lus Chaluim Chille or *achlasan Chaluim Chille* – Gaelic tradition links *Hypericum pulchrum* strongly to the most important saint in the history of Gaelic Scotland.